

NORHAM DEANERY SYNOD

MINUTES OF THE 26 SEPTEMBER 2011 MEETING

The meeting was held at the Cuthbert Centre on Holy Island. There were 22 present and 7 apologies for absence. The newly inducted Director of the (URC) centre, Rachel Poolman welcomed the synod, expressing a pleasure in this ecumenical co-operation, given that St Mary's Church does not have a suitable facility of its own for a meeting like this. It was chaired by Rob Kelsey, who welcomed Sheila Bamber, attending to facilitate the meeting's main discussion. Paul Collins opened in prayer and gave a summary of his first five months as Vicar of Holy Island.

1. MINUTES OF THE 28 JUNE 2011 MEETING

Accepted and signed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

2. WOMEN IN THE EPISCOPATE

Revd Canon Sheila Bamber (Diocesan Director of Education) gave a presentation (currently being given to all the Deanery Synods in the diocese) about the current situation concerning this complicated and sensitive issue. The key features to be discussed ('Document 2') had been circulated beforehand. The Diocesan Synod will meet on 12 November and will vote on whether or not to approve the Draft Legislation. If at least two-thirds of the dioceses approve, it will go to General Synod in February next year and then before Parliament. If this majority is not achieved, it is 'back to Square One'!

The Deanery Synods are not required to come to any decision on this matter, but Deanery representatives on the Diocesan Synod of course need to be aware of deanery opinion.

It has already been agreed that women should be admitted to the episcopate: the legislation is all about how to accommodate those who dissent – who, as much as those who assent, are deemed 'loyal Anglicans'.

There are now over 4000 women priests in the Church of England, 29% of the total.

It was explained that, as part of the legislation, the current Resolutions A/B/C on accepting women priests would be replaced by system whereby a PCC can pass a resolution requesting the bishop to provide alternative pastoral oversight ('transferred episcopal oversight' or TEA) where bishop and PCC are not in accord on this issue. Of 176 parishes in the Diocese of Newcastle, 21 have passed Resolutions A and B, and 3 Resolution B only – indicating that this subject is a problem for 15% of the parishes.

At the heart of the matter is the authority issue for conservative evangelicals ('scriptural headship is male') and for Anglo-Catholics (for whom, since the priest represents Christ at the sacraments, Christ's maleness is a vital element). And the conundrum question: if bishops cannot take sacraments together, are we a church?

Following the presentation there was time for discussion in small groups and then a time for wider sharing of thoughts:

- Is there a substantive difference between a priest and a bishop (or is it just a matter of additional experience and gifting for a more responsible position)? Logically, the question of women in the episcopate should have been settled before embarking on the ordination of deacons and priests.

- There is a lack of trust in Codes of Practice; and a general concern that decisions are having to be made before a code of practice for women bishops, and the accommodation for dissenters, has even been drafted.
- The key question was raised: can those who have a problem with the authority issue really be deemed 'loyal Anglicans' under the proposed legislation?
- Is it impossible to square this circle?
- Should the whole nature of bishoprics change from the existing geographical basis? If so, it would have to change for both men and women.
- The question was raised whether in the church's navel-gazing over this sensitive issue it might be ignoring what, in the long run, might be a more significant one: the over-feminising of the whole body of the church.
- We tend to look at these difficult issues as problems, whereas they could also be seen as exciting opportunities.

The presentation began with a liturgy of prayers and readings; and the discussion ended in a similar way.

3. NEXT DEANERY SYNOD MEETING DATES

Tues 6 December in the Green Room, Berwick Parish Church. The main topic will be Parish Share.