

READING DEANERY SYNOD

Minutes of the 4th meeting of the 2011 - 2014 Synod.

Held at St Matthew's Church, Southcote, Reading, on Wednesday 16th November 2011

Present:

Clergy	Lay members	Apologies
The Revd Canon B Shenton (chair)	Mr P Jeal (Chair)	Mr David Paine
The Revd Adam Carill	Mr Eric Anderson	Mr Les Pullen
The Revd Pads Dolphin	Mr Derek Benham	Mr Hugh Simpson
The Revd Graeme Farcourt	Ms Anne Bingham	Mr Gordon Summers
The Revd peter Grosse	Mr Michael Charles	Ms Anne Taylor
The Revd David Harris	Mr David Cox	Miss Joan Walker
The Revd Chris Leslie	Mr Ken Deane	Dr Elaine Watts
The Revd Chris Russell	Mr Mike Eggleton	
The Revd Denis Smith	Dr. Philip Giddings	
The Revd Derek Spears	Ms Sonia Higgs	
The Revd Stanton Saringer	Mr Jim Johnson	
The Revd Jeremy Tear	Dr Joanna Laynesmith	
The Revd Maggie Thorne	Ms Jane Lewis	
The Revd Dan Tyndall	Mr CJB Mott	

(2 failed to register their attendance)

(3 failed to register their attendance)

Also in attendance:

Dr Anna Betts – member of General Synod – Guest speaker

Welcome:

The Revd Canon Brian Shenton welcomed everyone to the meeting and paid tribute to the late Owen Jewiss, a staunch and long-serving member of the deanery synod as well as Diocesan Synod and a significant contributor to the work of the church throughout the Diocese. The meeting stood for a short time of silence and reflection in memory of Owen. The Revd Canon Brian Shenton had been privileged to stand beside Bishop John of Oxford as he bestowed the order of St Frideswide upon Owen a few days before Owen died.

Notices:

- a) **Area Dean** – had no notices to be relayed to the meeting.
- b) **Lay Chair** – Reminded churches to pay their parish share by the end of November to secure the rebate to the Deanery.
- c) **Treasurer** – Joan Walker requested that the latest guidance leaflet from the Diocese, entitled 'Giving' be collected and taken back to churches, also a letter to each church treasurer.

Opening Prayers:

These were led by the Revd. Pads Dolphin

Minutes of the last Synod:

Minutes of the Synod held in September were not presented but an amendment had been reported by several members as follows: The heading should have read 'Minutes of the 3rd meeting of the 2011 - 2014 Synod. Held at St Andrew's Church, Caversham, Reading' **not** 'Minutes of the 2nd meeting of the 2011 - 2014 Synod. Held at St John and St Stephen Church, Reading

Presentation

Dr Phillip Giddings presented a short background to the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant and continued in support of churches adopting it. He outlined that Jesus prayed for unity amongst his disciples and that the Covenant sought to re-affirm that unity which had continued over the centuries. In the C16 when the Anglican Church broke away from Rome it continued as the Catholic Church in England in continuity with the Apostolic Church. Since the Reformation the Church in other Continents and the spread of missionaries these churches have needed to make their own decisions. The Church has no constitution, rules or instructions, but has followed the lead of Bishops and Church leaders. In 1867 a dispute over biblical teaching in Natal brought about the 1st Lambeth Conference, of which there have been a further 14 bringing about self government and political independence whilst maintaining a shared interdependence. This all works well when there is agreement. Twenty years ago questions of sexuality brought about disagreement and led on to further questions of how to manage churches who disagreed with the majority viewpoint. It was the Winsor report of 2004 which suggested a Covenant. In 2008 the first draft was debated and amended during that year. Further debates continued until this final draft at the end of 2009.

The Covenant does not provide for new doctrine but provides a process of sharing what churches have in common and deals with consequences of churches which have differing views.

The first section entitled 'Our Inheritance of Faith' summarises the beliefs of the Anglican Church.

Section two entitled 'The Life We Share with Others: Our Anglican Vocation' focuses on mission.

Section three turns to 'Our Unity and Common Life' where each church re-affirms its life in communion with autonomy and accountability.

Section four 'Our Covenanted Life Together' has caused the most controversy. This section covers the operating procedures, the overseeing of procedures to be maintained by the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion and the role of the Standing Committee in facilitating agreement where necessary.

Some drafts were much stronger on points but have been softened to be more inclusive. Churches enter into agreement of the Covenant freely and provision is made for those who opt out.

The Covenant seeks to have global inclusion which will enable clergy to visit from other parts of the world and Anglicans to worship in other parts of the world in their recognised way.

It is either this Covenant or nothing as the Archbishop seeks unity and a possible alternative would be to dissolve the Anglican Church as we know it.

In summary the Covenant is in line with doctrine, cannot do any harm and not to accept it would make life very difficult to Archbishops and other church leaders.

Dr Anna Betts felt it important not to dwell on homosexuality but must consider how best to deal with any differing points of view and questioned whether the Covenant would assist this. She recognized that Archbishop Rowan is striving to hold the Anglican Church together but also that there was dissention amongst General Synod members who felt that it would not work. In one province it was women as priests that made them reject and they then considered themselves as second tier members. Questions remain about what is constitutional and legal and the Covenant will force these issues. In his paper John Rees omitted to consider the colonial legacy and several Colonial countries have voted against the Covenant, including the Philippines, West Africa and Gambia.

Considering history, heritage and culture, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh amongst others have also stated that they cannot accept the Covenant as it stands. Canada does not think that it is a fair document.

Section four indicates one offending issue but there could be multiple ones and Dr Betts was not alone in wondering if the Standing Committee could handle such a scenario. She recognized the communion enjoyed by Bishops and Archbishops but success cannot be taken for granted and the covenant as it stands could fracture communion in her view and there are easier ways to reconciliation without the structure of a Covenant. In Colossians we read of Paul's teaching on fear, forgiveness but harmony when clothed in love.

Questions of clarity from Synod members raised issues of further fracturing churches from other countries such as India; the ingenuity of the Anglican Church in accommodating clergy from overseas; brought to light the views of more countries, such as New Zealand which lacks agreement from the Maoris, Ireland which will subscribe the Congo which thinks it will work but seeks time to think about some of the issues and Brazil's rejection. The USA indicates that it can cope with differences whilst still following Jesus. There is no need to accept the Covenant and it may take 2-5 years to accept. If the Church of England rejects then this is a serious situation for Archbishop Rowan.

Consequences of a split in the Church of England are unknown as are the effects on the most vulnerable as they seem to have less of a say than they currently have. Whether a 'Memorandum of Understanding' would have been a better title. Whether to wait for disintegration or do something now raised the point although communion will change folk in the pews are unlikely to notice any changes. The role of the Standing Committee remained unclear and its ability to cope with healing fractures and maintaining unity.

Phillip's final conclusion was to thank God that God is in charge and Anna that unity is invoked by different people at different times and for different reasons.

Although not requested by the Diocese it was thought best to seek a vote on the view of Synod with the following result (noting that the figures do not correspond with the numbers signed in at the meeting):

	For	Against	Abstentions
House of Clergy	8	6	2
House of Laity	10	9	5

The meeting was closed in Prayer by the Revd Canon Brian Shenton.

For those wishing to read further the additional resources as given by Bishop John are included here:

- The paper from Canon John Rees used to introduce the covenant discussion at Diocesan Synod in June.

<http://www.oxford.anglican.org/synod/diocesan-synod/>

- The briefing Paper from the Faith and Order Commission, which includes the text of the Anglican Communion Covenant and some frequently asked questions(GS Misc 966)

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1161753/gsmisc966.pdf>

- The text of the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant (GS 1809)

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1150766/gs1809.pdf>

- The Archbishop of Canterbury's Presidential Address at General Synod in November 2010

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/3056>

- Arguments against the covenant are set out at

<http://modernchurch.org.uk/anglican covenant> and <http://www.noanglican covenant.org>