



# **Open Synod Group**

## **Newsletter**

### **Summer 2020**

President : Right Rev Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover

Chair : Robin Back, Norwich

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*Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells*

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## **Editorial**

We live in strange times. This was to be my last editorial. Welcome to the first sexennium.

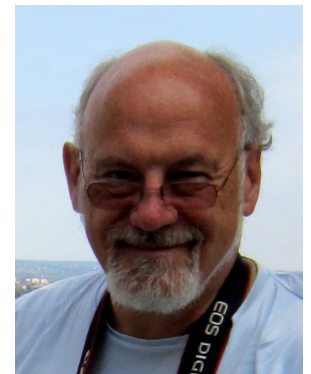
I started to write this just as lockdown has begun to be eased and folk in parishes are beginning to ask questions about whether they should be allowed to browse in bookshops when they can't worship in their churches. The stories of this pandemic will be told for decades to come.

So much has changed, so quickly, that, as we approach the weekend of our General Synod Zoom® experience, many will have experienced Private Prayer and Public Worship.

In practice, our own Diocese will be having an informal Diocesan Synod Zoom® this week and I have already lost count of the Diocesan and Deanery Meetings that we have experienced using technology.

We thought that it would be part of the "new normal" to keep some things the same. And so we are offering these offerings to keep you informed, entertained and, hopefully, engaged in things synodical (or synodal for those in York Province?).

I confess that I have been very impressed with the way my local parish (civil & ecclesiastical) have responded with support and acts of kindness.



We are unlikely to go back completely to the way we were in parochial or synodical mechanisms. There will be new ways of doing things. However, as I saw the pictures of another place trying to vote on how to vote it made me think that the Church of England is centuries ahead in its capacity to change compared to some other institutions.

Of one thing I am convinced. We have, maybe, lost something during the pandemic. However, we have discovered way in which we can connect with those are, or have been unable, to join with us due to disability, frailty or fear through the use of technology.

We need to consider how as a church we can use our resources to ensure that a presence in every place in the land doesn't mean only physical.

Thank God for the ways in which he moves us.

Once again I am immensely grateful for those who have offered contributions this time around and remind you that as always the individuals do so from a personal perspective and the views expressed do not represent a position of the Open Synod Group.

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## Chair's Reflections

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### *Robin Back, Chair, Open Synod Group*

Looking back at my contribution in February, not a mention of Viruses, lockdown or indeed any other prospective disruption such as we have seen since March 23rd! It seems almost impossible to avoid a charge of naivety at best – or ostrich behaviour at worst! When I wrote in February, my wife and I had just flown back from visiting our daughters and their families in the Antipodes and Singapore. Coronavirus was still a Chinese provincial issue on somebody else's horizon.

Fast forward a mere 3 months and we have suffered the most severe personal restrictions in our history, an economic blow of proportions few can even guess at, the ongoing threat to life and last but not least the devastating effect on us as Christians up and down the land. Our churches are closed for the first time ever and access restricted to a designated officeholder. Cleaning and maintenance shelved for the duration, rural churchyards assuming jungle status and so on.

Is there a light ahead? Yes indeed there is and it's not an oncoming train! Things may well be differently organised after the pandemic passes but God remains constant in our hearts and minds and our collective faith will survive. Electronic services via Zoom® or Teams® are attracting existing congregations and new members alike. Many of these are finding solace from the sight of other members of their congregation they are perhaps unable to meet and to gain reassurance of their health at the same time.

Whatsapp, Facetime, Zoom®, Teams® and many others offer something to communities we didn't have before. These will become tools for the Church's recovery when Churches reopen and must be adopted or adapted and not disregarded as perhaps rivalling 'real' Church. Without these fresh approaches and novel rethinking of how we convey our message to the country, we risk finding ourselves marginalised or ignored. How then do we explain ourselves to St. Peter?

God Bless and keep safe!



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## From Chief Nurse to Bishop

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### *The Rt Hon and Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally, Bishop of London*

It is now just over two years since I was installed as the 133<sup>rd</sup> Bishop of London – the diocese’s first female bishop. 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018 happily marked Florence Nightingale’s birthday, and it was the year which marked 100 years since some women received the vote.

The two most frequently asked questions of me still include a quizzical, ‘how is it going’ as if I was going to pour out my heart? However, it is going well and, as someone said to me, I now seem to be the new normal.

The second question I am asked is, ‘it must be so different?’ Well, it is not! I was reminded when washing people’s feet at the Maundy Thursday service in St Paul’s last year that people are the same the world over. Washing feet is something which has been at the heart of my vocation, whether as a nurse or a priest. It is an even more poignant memory in a period where physical contact has been so limited.

Having spent much of my adult life in London, I found myself in the West Country for five years and you would be surprised how similar churches are in the rural villages of Devon to the city here in London – albeit there is less grass. We are called as priests and bishops and no two villages are the same, whether in the West Country or in London. Much of my first two years have been spent getting to know, and to be known, by those across the capital’s different, varied communities.

You can take the nurse out of nursing, but never nursing out of the nurse. I am both the priest and bishop because of my experience as a nurse; practically, pastorally and as a leader. I undertook some of my hardest work theologically as a nurse and as the Government’s Chief Nursing Officer. My model of leadership has always been as one who serves.

I am watched, people project on to me their expectations which I am certain I will not live up to. I am conscious that, as has been written, my selfhood begins when I walk away from the expectations of others.

I am very different from my predecessor, which is a gift, but people still say of me that I have big shoes to fill: my voice needs to be deeper; it must be hard not being as tall as he was; or even having his beard. I remind myself and others that I have my own shoes and my own voice – and I will not be growing a beard. I have to be faithful to who I am, the person God has called me to be.

Florence Nightingale said that she gave her heart to the Church and it would not have it. I am grateful that when God called me, I gave my heart too, and it has been a privilege to serve the Diocese of London over the last two years.



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## Chairing the General Synod

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### *Aiden Hargreaves-Smith, London*

The invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York to join the panel of Chairs of the General Synod came as even more of a surprise to me than I can only suspect it did to others. Under the Constitution of the General Synod, Their Graces, as joint Presidents of the Synod, are entitled to chair its proceedings. However, for reasons of practicality, and so that the Archbishops themselves may be free to contribute to the Synod's proceedings, they appoint two or three members of each House to chair most items of business.



I quickly discovered that the Foolproof Guide to Chairing the General Synod had not yet been published! (As I have come to learn, even if that title were to hit the bookshops, the 467 best qualified potential authors probably all have a different perspective on the precise characteristics that make a good Chair.) The initial training comprised an afternoon's discussion about 'key moments' for a Chair, a canter through the Synod's Standing Orders and some rather more intentional observation for a Group of Sessions. Ultimately, however, nothing quite prepares you for your first experience of making your way onto the platform and taking the chair.

All Chairs work hard to try to ensure that the Synod's business is conducted efficiently, fairly and well. Sometimes, that may be easier said than done! Whilst a Chair may give a considerable amount of time to preparation for a debate, it cannot (and should not) be 'pre-programmed', and ultimately, it is the members of the Synod who control its proceedings. Points of order and procedural motions come from the floor of the Synod!

A Chair's perspective can sometimes be different from that of other members. Not a few members, over the years, have felt frustrated at not having been called to make what would (of course) have been the best speech of the debate! But I dare to suggest that not a few Chairs have felt frustrated, when trying to ensure a balanced and well-informed debate involving a broad range of speakers, at the relatively limited range of members standing. A Chair can only call to speak a member who is standing (or, for those unable to do so, otherwise indicating a wish to speak).

For those wishing to help the Chair in facilitating a good debate, it is always worth remembering three key points:

- (i) If you wish to speak, always try to submit a Request to Speak at the earliest opportunity, having completed it succinctly and carefully. You might even mention it en passant to the particular Chair if you bump into him or her earlier in the Group of Sessions.
- (ii) If you wish to be called in a debate, do find a place from which you will be more easily visible to the Chair when you stand (or otherwise signify). Chairs do their best, but do not have X-Ray wonder-vision!
- (iii) If your points have been made by another speaker, do consider whether, in the limited time available, it would be more helpful for the Synod to hear a different perspective.

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## General Synod Retrospective

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### *The Revd. Simon Talbott, Ely*

I was first elected to General Synod at the start of this Quinquennium to represent the Diocese of Ely. Arriving at the inauguration of the new Quinquennium in Nov. 2015 I felt a strange sense of awe, rather like the first day at 'big school'! The formal opening and Eucharist at Westminster Abbey were memorable and gave me a strong sense of belonging to the wider Church of England. During the days that followed, I caught up with many colleagues lay and ordained, that I have been privileged to know and work with over nearly 30 years of ministry in the Church of England.



I was very pleased that I knew my way around Church House already, as I had been a member of a Church Commissioners committee (Church Buildings - Uses & Disposals now Mission, Pastoral & Church Buildings) for a few years before. The induction days in Nov. 2015 were invaluable and gave a 'newby' enough knowledge to survive the first Group of Sessions proper in Feb. 2016.

I have enjoyed greatly the opportunity to make a small contribution to the life of our national church in the last five years. It has been a steep learning curve, but I have enjoyed it very much and would encourage others to put themselves forward for election. I have established some good friendships and at the end of the Quinquennium (slightly extended, due to the Covid-19 pandemic) I am really just feeling that I know my way around processes and how to make a difference.

My two abiding memories of the past five years will be my first speech, which happened on the first day of the Feb. 2016 Groups of Sessions. I had planned a very short contribution to the debate on the future of church buildings, coming from a position of knowledge after 12 years of DAC service. To my shock (and horror!) I was called to speak very early in the debate and given a five minute slot. Some quick thinking enabled me to expand my planned contribution to fill the time.

My second memory will be the debate and vote on the 'take note' paper on Marriage & Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversation processes. The vote to decline to 'take note' showed the General Synod at its best in holding the senior leadership of our church to account.

As I have been given the privilege of an additional year on top of my five years of service, I hope to stand for re-election in 2021.

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## Opening my Church For Private Prayer

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*Robin Back, Norwich*

As Churchwarden of St Peter's Church, Guestwick in Norfolk, I welcomed the June 15<sup>th</sup> relaxations and authority to re-open under limited circumstances for private prayer. I'm not sure I would have been quite as keen if I had known the conditions in advance. However, with the aid of our PCC Treasurer and Secretary (my wife) we set to...

First thing was to define what we needed to do, walk the routes, measure social distancing, etc. In our case we roped off the chancel, including the choir and stalls and pulpit, and every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> pew. Decisions made on what signs, sanitiser etc. were needed we were now ready to start.

First practical thing was to clean. Dust of three months, bat droppings in the nave and chancel, cobwebs everywhere, foggy windows... The inside of the building was embarrassing to look at. We started with bat droppings. These accumulate under their nursery roost (chancel arch) and under a year-round roost favoured by the natterers bats inside the front door. Bat experts know that before leaving their roost to feed in the evening, bats exercise to stretch their wings. Since our Church has a Clerestory above the nave, the results of their nightly exercise are scattered over the nave and chancel and on the walls. Apologies to nature lovers but plastic sheeting is a godsend for catching these so we can use them to manure the churchyard.

Bat droppings disposed of, next came the windows. These are diamond-pane windows and not in the first flush of youth. Hence they take some time to clean with care. In addition they are 8 ft tall and even standing on the windowsill we struggle to reach the top.

Now we attack the dust. We don't have a Hoover so it's brooms and dustpan and brush work. First sweep the pews onto the floor, then sweep the pew floors into the aisles, then sweep the aisles. At this point, we can give ourselves a bit of encouragement by polishing the pews. The scent of polish in Church is a great reward for elbow grease. So, what was next?

Actually, not a lot! A table for the sanitiser and tissues, a bin, notices to visitors about routes and available pews; Hazard tape on the entrance step, Social distancing posters, a note on our Church history and another notice with a QR code on it enabling visitors to make a contribution, if they desire, without physical money. Notice for those needing wheelchair access, removal of hymn and prayer books and hassocks, children's wildlife folders and so on. Mustn't forget the 'Welcome' notice outside.

Final touch – a flower display on the font for when the polish fades.

God Bless and keep safe!



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