

In the Diocese of Europe
THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHURCH OF ANDORRA
ST. GEORGE'S

REPORT ON THE ARCHDEACONRY SYNOD 2009

INTRODUCTION:

The delegates from Andorra to the 2009 Synod were Jo Hine and John Pinnell. Jo is the veteran of a number of past synod attendances (and met a number of other participants who also had attended over the years and knew her) while John was on his first synod (where he opened his mouth too often in plenary sessions but met a lot of interesting people partly as a result of that).

The synod covers all the chaplaincies in the archdeaconry – ie in Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, Morocco and Andorra. Most of the chaplaincies, and all the largest, are in Spain, so most of the participants are UK nationals living in Spain – both clergy and laity.

Synod representatives serve for three years – but a certain number of those attending appear to be perpetual representatives of their chaplaincies.

PROGRAMME:

The theme of the synod was “loving God, loving our neighbours, loving ourselves”. Except for the Bible study sessions and the Eucharist sermon led by Bishop Bill Godfrey from Peru, the theme was not very evident. However, with much general administrative business it is hard to pursue a theme such as this in the relatively limited time available.

The programme included morning and evening worship and a daily Eucharist service. The last evening worship was centred on healing and allowed for a laying on of hands by Bishop David and anointing with oil by the two clergy assisting him. The quality of the sermons at the Eucharist and healing service was remarkable. The volume and quality of the singing of hymns (especially with the tone effect of having many men present) was impressive and at times moving. The conviction in the responses and in the saying of the Lord's Prayer was really uplifting.

Apart from the business sessions, there was a key discussion session on chaplaincy issues raised by the clergy, an energizing and moving report on the progress of the Church in Peru, a thoughtful presentation on the 2008 General Synod and a surprisingly motivating report by Bishop David on the 2008 Lambeth Conference. Both the General Synod and the Lambeth Conference seem to have been much misrepresented in media reporting.

The programme allowed time to visit El Escorial (a huge granite monument to the contradictions inherent in Phillip 11 of Spain as the ruler of much of the then known world, a family man and a religious near mystic). It is the religious element that prevails as the monastery palace is so much more visible as monastery and church than as palace.

Lastly, the synod allowed time over food, coffee and after dinner socializing to meet with and talk extensively with other participants.

PEOPLE WE MET:

The Archdeacon, David Sutch, clearly remembers his visit to us and the weekend he stayed with Valerie and Bohdan. He was overheard speaking of us approvingly as people who work together and manage very effectively without a resident chaplain. We also renewed our contacts with Bob Short from Ibiza (who will be visiting us again in March) and we met Andrew Tweedy from Barcelona (who is our visitor in February and was concerned about whether to buy chains for his car). Robert Ellis from Mallorca was also there – he last visited when John Melin was still here.

We met so many people. None were difficult. So many were interesting to talk with. Jo was not surprised at this. John left with a feeling that this had been a very special type of occasion and looking forward to his next synod.

BUSINESS SESSIONS:

There is really nothing outstanding to report to Andorra. We can be glad that we do not have the issues with chaplain's stipends (are they expressed sterling or euros?), social security or income taxes that our Spanish chaplaincies have. John acted as a bit more than interpreter with the Spanish lady expert who presented on this and came away giving unofficial individual counsel to various people. We can also be glad that we have relative financial calm here – and no buildings to maintain. Nor do we complain about diocesan and archdeaconry dues. Finally we do not appear to have any of the issues that the diocesan Secretary had to review with us all. We should just thank the Lord for being small, simple and able to look after ourselves.

KEY DISCUSSION SESSION:

The session was based around some of the key issues raised by participants last year as being important in the relations between clergy and laity. The list of issues was reinforced by a survey in 2008 of clergy views. There are eleven items listed (not set out here as many do not apply where there is no chaplain) and the groups into which we were divided touched on three of them. John and Jo were in two different groups. The next two paragraphs may serve to reinforce how lucky we are here. In John's group the issues raised were based on:

- (a) Diverse congregations where it is hard to please all of the people even some of the time, especially when the chaplaincies are more groupings of English speaking people than of Anglicans (we have that diversity but no single chaplain to upset or challenge with it)
- (b) "Alpha male issues" where too many of the chaplaincy council forget that they are no longer big fish in big ponds and seek to make themselves heard and felt (our issue may even be a lack of a proportionate number of males even if one of our two at least is prone to behave as if this were a business).
- (c) Factions within a congregation which led to the conclusion that chaplains need to be friends to all and close friends with none (we do not appear to have any concept of what a faction is – fortunately or by the Grace of God).

In Jo's group the issues raised were based on:

- (a) What can be done about the inappropriate use of power by laity in a congregation (both with the congregation and with the chaplain).
- (b) What sort of programmes, training and other steps might be helpful for a congregation or for churchwardens (the idea of training was welcomed and would be welcome to us in Andorra too).

THE 2008 GENERAL SYNOD:

Anne Turner (from Belgium) who was one of the two diocesan representatives at the General Synod demonstrated just how demanding being a member of General Synod is. There is a huge volume of preparation reading and the synod itself sounds exhausting. The sheer range of topics treated is intimidating (from climate change to clergy terms of service, from the issue of detention without trial to reader ministry and on to relationships between churches).

She praised Bishop Geoffrey for his ability to make his point, no matter how little time was allowed to him to speak, succinctly and effectively.

One issue which received lots of press coverage was on the ordaining of and role of women bishops – a key issue in many countries where the local social or religious situation inhibits ordaining them. The end of the debate was an agreement to come back to the issue again in 2009 to decide how to implement a resolution. The resolution itself stated that arrangements should be made for ordaining women bishops but that there may be differences or exceptions by country. It sounds as though the really tough issues will appear in the detail regulations to be discussed in 2009.

THE 2008 LAMBETH CONFERENCE:

Bishop David gave a surprisingly interesting presentation that took us behind the scenes to appreciate what this involves for a bishop attending (and why a number chose not to). We should remember that this major event occurs every ten years and this time 630 bishops gathered in Canterbury for the conference (and that implies that about 130 – including all bishops from some African countries) did not attend. Their issues – well gay bishops as a start.

Bishop David led us through the five opening retreat sessions led by the Archbishop of Canterbury personally, through the small group sessions, through the indaba sessions (a zulu word for gathering together to seek solutions to a problem – here used for groups of forty bishops in open discussion and exchange of views) and also through the formal sessions and protocol visits. We came away confident that Bishop David was right in saying that, although there were very different views expressed on key issues, there was a general level of mutual respect among all the bishops that bodes well for the future of the Church.

SECESSION IN MALAGA:

There has been an issue in the Malaga area where an assistant curate resigned and then decided to set up his own church group and was followed by a number of members of the congregation. He has obtained recognition as a chaplain from the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church via their Bishop Carlos, and this breakaway church meets weekly very near the existing church in the locality and advertizes itself in the English language press locally. It was evident from the debate on a motion to protest to the synod of our sister church (the SREC is a member of the Anglican communion) that deep feelings and passions have been aroused by this split. In the end a fairly simple resolution was proposed and left with a small group of clergy to finalize on behalf of synod. We can only hope for and pray for a gradual healing process to enable reconciliation between the various people involved locally.

BISHOP BILL GODFREY:

Bishop Bill, the bishop of Peru, is a study from El Greco in physical terms and also in spiritual ones – he positively exudes a spiritual power and presence. His two Bible studies were outstanding for the lack of need to ever consult a Bible (he quoted from all parts of the Bible with ease and assurance and no demands that we look up the references) and for his sheer ability to be pragmatic, demanding, theologically exacting – and very, very human and amusing. It is hard not to be totally absorbed with his teaching. Nobody failed to be totally impressed. A report of what he said simply fails to convey how it was expressed.

However, some thoughts. The power of resurrection changes the power of death. Jesus' mission was always delivered with love. We must all be missionary churches as that is what the apostles were charged with in the first appearance of Christ after the resurrection. We must combine preaching and deeds – we have a holistic mission that requires more than just preaching – doing things with people involves them in our work so much more easily. God the Holy Spirit points to God the Son in the person of Jesus – we must be open to the presence of the Holy Spirit in us

Bishop Bill also gave us all a presentation by slide show of many photographs of the work of the Church in Peru. The Anglican Church works almost entirely with the poor in areas where the Catholic Church has not established a presence (such as slum areas of Lima and other cities or a remote rural area where there is no resident priest). It is expanding entirely through the training up of local priests and helpers. It largely builds its own chapels (by hand). It has a significant presence in helping local people wherever it goes. It thrives through its deeds.

It should be no surprise that David Sutch presented Bishop Bill with the new stole that his wife had made for him from local Spanish materials as a gesture of the thanks we all had for his presence nor that the silent collection (ie notes only) for missionary work in Peru raised well over €1,200. Nor that we all expect to meet Bishop Bill again next year. Bishop Bill of course had one more surprise – a beautiful hand embroidered altar hanging made in a church workshop in Peru (which employs 64

women who previously had no work). It is a brightly coloured and very populated nativity scene; the wise men come with llamas of course and not with camels.

CONCLUSION:

This was both a busy and a moving synod. Jo reaffirmed the deep feelings that attending synod give. John experienced something beyond what any other conference had ever given him. They will both be willing travelers to the next synod – the second of their three year term.

Jo Hine & John Pinnell
February, 2009