

Fel Na Choller Dim ❖ That Nothing Be Lost

A Conversation to Preserve the Breadth of Welsh Anglicanism

21-22 September 2016

Building Relationships and Trust: The English Experience since November 2012

Address by the Revd Canon Simon Killwick

The process leading up to the November 2012 vote was damaging to relationships and trust, because draft legislation was put through the formal synodical process before there was sufficient consensus to achieve the required majorities at Final Approval. The draft legislation relied heavily on a Code of Practice which wouldn't have provided security for traditionalists, especially in the bad atmosphere of the time. Passing the 2012 Measure wouldn't have provided closure, or the consecration of women bishops, either; further years of acrimonious debate would have followed to establish a Code of Practice, before women could have been consecrated as bishops. The 2012 legislation would have provided that disputes could only have been resolved through judicial review in the High Court; we can imagine what that would have done to relationships.

Although the draft Measure failed to achieve the necessary majorities in November 2012, the seeds of a fresh approach and settlement were sown before then. In December 2011, Dr Mark Beach, then Team Rector in Rugby and a member of the General Synod, convened a small representative group of Synod members for mediated conversations in Coventry; the mediator was David Porter, then Canon for Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral. While this was a private initiative, the Bishop of Coventry was also present, and he informed the Archbishop of Canterbury of the conversations. The time together was helpful, but the WATCH representatives preferred to rely on the synodical process, which was already fairly advanced. In August 2012, Archbishops Rowan and Sentamu asked Bishop Justin Welby (then of Durham) to convene further talks in Coventry with a larger group of Synod members, again with Canon David Porter. It was then too late in the synodical process for the talks to make a difference. A further seed which bore fruit after November 2012 was the second and uncontroversial amendment proposed by the House of Bishops to the 2013 Measure; the amendment recognised the distinction between sacramental authority, deriving from a person's consecration, and legal or canonical authority, deriving from the office a person holds. Finally, there was the realisation that goodwill was needed to achieve a settlement which would enable us to move forward together.

Very soon after the failure of the legislation in November 2012, Prebendary Rod Thomas and I called for round-table talks to be held with a mediator to reach agreement on a fresh legislative package. The House of Bishops agreed to set up a mixed working group to work towards a fresh package; the working group held facilitated conversations, with a larger representative group of Synod members and a team of mediators led by David Porter. The facilitated conversations took place early in 2013; they were painful, after years of acrimonious debate, but they brought about a huge improvement in atmosphere, with participants talking to each other, rather than at each other, and meeting each other as people.

There was discussion of theological issues, which led eventually to the Five Guiding Principles in the House of Bishops' Declaration. While there was no agreement on the way forward, the majority of the participants took a significant step towards each other. Feedback was given from the conversations to the working group and the House of Bishops.

In May 2013, the House of Bishops published the fruit of the working group's work in GS 1886; this included the Five Guiding Principles and four possible options for a fresh legislative package. The House of Bishops recommended the first option, which was for simple legislation to enable women to be consecrated as bishops and to repeal the statutory rights to pass Resolutions A and B. The 1993 Act of Synod would also be rescinded; it would be replaced either by a new Act of Synod or a Declaration by the House of Bishops to make provision for traditionalists, which would not be legally binding. GS 1886 suggested that a mediation process could be included to build trust.

The House of Bishops' proposals were brought to the General Synod in July 2013. All Synod members took part in facilitated conversations, which led to a much improved atmosphere. The draft proposals were not promising for traditionalists in terms of assurance, nor for the Synod as a whole, as voting on amendments showed that the proposals would not achieve the required majorities at Final Approval. The turning point came when the Bishop of Dover successfully moved an amendment to introduce a mandatory dispute resolution procedure, which showed a seriousness about provision. The Bishop of Gloucester suggested that a requirement for a two-thirds majority for any changes to House of Bishops' Declaration could be built in – a further indication of seriousness. The Bishop of Willesden suggested that a mixed Steering Committee be established to reach consensus on the draft package. The situation then looked much more promising, with a good chance of reaching a settlement that would not only give assurance to traditionalists, but also achieve Final Approval in the Synod.

A mixed Steering Committee was set up, which I will leave to Dagmar Winter to talk about, as she was a member of it.

The final package which came to the Synod included the following ingredients:

- a simple Measure to enable the consecration of women
- a House of Bishops' Declaration including the Guiding Principles and provision for traditionalists (a two-thirds majority would be needed to change the Declaration)
- a Canon providing for Regulations to be made by House of Bishops for the Dispute Resolution procedure (two-thirds majorities would be needed to change the Regulations).

It was a great example of what can be achieved with very simple legislation, a declaration of underlying principles outlining provisions, a mandatory disputes resolution procedure, some entrenchment and goodwill on all sides. The settlement embodied unity in diversity: unity under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop; diversity with the provision of appropriate bishops for traditionalists, under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop, but whose sacramental authority derived from their episcopal consecration.

Had the previous legislation passed in November 2012, the first women bishops would not have been consecrated until at least 2015, because of the time needed to agree the Code of Practice first. The new legislation passed in 2014 led to the consecrations of Libby Lane and Philip North in February 2015; the consecrations took place in a much better atmosphere, with goodwill and joy, and a fresh willingness to work together.