

Diocesan Synod

Report from Session at St Nicholas Church, Corfe Mullen, Saturday 8 February 2014

Presidential Address

The Bishop of Salisbury touched on the main themes of mission and 'renewing hope', along with recent flooding, women bishops, also stressing the importance of Elections for Deanery Synod and General Synod.

On the Pilling Report, he said: "there are strong and divergent views among faithful Christians. We need to do so with what our Archbishop has called, "good disagreement". It won't help if we see this as a distraction from the main tasks. Nor will it help us if we allow this to be the single defining issue of the Church. We need to conduct ourselves so that we model what it is to be a Christian today, and conduct the conversations in ways that witness to the love of the Lord Jesus."

He welcomed Bishop Elijah of Cueibet before launching the South Sudan Appeal, saying, "Since early December there has been terrible fighting in South Sudan. A report published on Wednesday by Médecins Sans Frontières says that the speed and scale of the violence over the past six weeks in South Sudan has been unprecedented...The anger at those who did this is very great.

"Please give generously and find ways to ask your churches and communities to give. The people of Wiltshire and Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth have taken the Sudanese to heart and will want to contribute to meet their needs now."

Official page: www.salisbury.anglican.org/mission/the-sudan-link/south-sudan-crisis-appeal

Energising Local Ministry (ELM)

Gil Williams, Chairman of the ELM Reference Group, spoke of a growing framework of community and shared leadership, fresh ways of developing local ministry and shared patterns of worship; changing the mindset of a benefice from 'separate congregations' to 'one congregation'; and a lay-led and inspired relationship rooted in prayer, leading to "adventuresome love and social action."

The Revd Alison Way told of lessons learned from Evreux; a diocese of similar size with only 36 priests; and a focus on three points:

1. Proclaiming the Gospel
2. Worship
3. Service

She said, "We need to move away from 'helping the vicar' and towards building the Kingdom of God!"

Anne Pretty spoke on marriage preparation courses run by LPAs in Royal Wootton Bassett; Janet Drury on 'Open The Book' courses pioneering new links between parish and school in Lyneham and Bradenstoke; and Dave May on Men's Breakfast meetings in the local pub in Lyneham.

Social Justice

Archdeacon Paul Taylor outlined the new working group and Colin Brady featured the "staggeringly effective" Read Easy scheme with a clip of Mark, a former traveller, as an example. Colin also mentioned the aim of securing two or three 'Social Justice Champions' in each Deanery and introduced Adrian Brook, Chaplain to Gypsies, Travellers and Showmen in the South West of England.

Adrian spoke of the new support group that had been set up, as well as the need to 'help Travellers to help themselves, challenge prejudice, raise issues on PCC agendas and offer support for traveller sites. Recent successes included the Mobile Home Act 2013, according traveller sites the same rights for as for supported housing, and an article published in the Church Times with the support of the Diocesan Comms Team.

Adrian's page: www.salisbury.anglican.org/mission/social-justice/gypsies-and-travellers

Rosemary Macdonald, Chief Executive of Wiltshire and Swindon Community Fund (WSCF), was similarly challenging, asking “Is social justice on the PCC agenda?” and “How much is your church being used for other people?” She advised Synod to ‘start where you are, build on existing strengths and celebrate success.’ She also mentioned that support was available from diocesan toolkits, WSCF and parishioners themselves.

WSCF: www.wscf.org.uk

In the subsequent Q&A, a dozen contributors spoke of the need for caution in direct comparisons with Evreux, where church buildings are state-funded; the limitations of ancient buildings; the fact that many of the examples given were already being done in other places and the need to publicise these; the need for the ‘animation’ of the Holy Spirit as the laity were given licence to exercise their gifts and for further theological work; the need to use existing facilities creatively; that ‘God’s justice’ was preferable to the term ‘social justice’; that mobiles and emails were useless in some areas; and that urban areas might pave the way of good practice in rural areas.

Awards

After lunch, Bishop David Hallett presented DAC Awards to Hawkchurch St John the Baptist (bells restored in our only Devon parish), Royal Wootton Bassett (an “awesome” reordering after vandalism and smoke damage) and Woodford All Saints (a new window with narrative detail and interest; an aid to worship by a leading glass artist).

Colin Brady introduced the inaugural Social Justice Awards, given to Bemerton St Michael for ‘Coffee and Chat’ and Portland for their community lunches, and the Bishop of Salisbury presented the certificates.

Criteria for future award-winning projects include:

- Showing evidence of need
- Making a real difference
- Looking likely to continue
- Having good community support

Pilling Report

Next, the Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, the Church of England’s Director of Mission and Public Affairs, carefully introduced the House of Bishops Working Group Report on Human Sexuality (known as the Pilling Report) and plans for two years of facilitated discussions, with resources available.

Quoting the Archbishop of Canterbury’s remarks that “The cultural and political ground is changing... a revolution... and we have not fully heard it,” Dr Brown particularly recommended reading the prologue to the report and stressed that the listening process was pivotal: “We need to listen to those we disagree with.”

He noted that there were minorities in votes and that “This is NOT about the majority getting its way. Votes will not stand forever. Any of us could be in a losing position in a given vote.”

In reply, Synod members asserted the need to express views as well as listening; to consider the existing frameworks in the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and Lambeth Resolutions; and to exercise extreme caution in any attempt to ‘trade theology’.

Carbon Fast

The Bishop of Ramsbury concisely proposed the motion to adopt the ‘40 40 40 Challenge’ approach to the 2014 Carbon Fast during Lent, a Salisbury Diocesan version of the South West Dioceses’ commitment to reducing carbon as a learning exercise. David Morgan gave brief details and played the official Tearfund clip.

Link to clip: www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKf0Xm6wWVI

During a mixed response, Synod members questioned the validity and feasibility of the Challenge; asked why long-term measures were not being put forward; and raised the issue of how future generations would view the actions to be taken.

Bishop Edward quoted Desmond Tutu saying he believed Apartheid would end. The interviewer wondered if this was over-optimistic: he replied, "Brother, the whole of Christianity is hopelessly optimistic!" In the event, the vote was carried overwhelmingly.

Official page: www.salisbury.anglican.org/mission/social-justice/40-40-40

The Bishop of Salisbury asked Synod members to speak to each other on the theme of 'renewing hope' and what they would take away. Concluding, he spoke of the positive feel of the day and, quoting the final verses in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, he asserted, "We're in this together!"

Synod closed at 3.09pm.