

**Diocesan Synod Feb 2010
Presidential Address**

The theme of today's Synod is Mission, Social Commitment and the Common Good, and we are being invited to ponder on the links between our believing and our doing, and whether we are cutting the mustard out there.

Do we live out what we proclaim? Isn't that the acid test: 'faith without works is dead', as St James says. Or are you only too aware of the Reformation tag, '*sola fide*': 'since we are justified by faith alone', as St Paul says.

This morning, I want to offer you a different way of looking at these apparent polarities.

For many generations we have been suspicious of the activists, or enthusiasts as a group came to be known in the 18th century. There are plenty of people regularly worshipping with us on Sundays who think that actually doing anything about what we believe is a bolt-on extra for those who like that kind of thing. They are adequately happy for us to have a radical wing – preferably of paid professionals so that there's a bit of distance between the Gentlemen and the Players, as it used to be for the cricketers in Wisden's Almanac when the amateurs and professionals were so neatly – and socially – differentiated – to undertake the work on our behalf, but would prefer not to have to do it themselves. The trouble is that 'activist' has become a dirty word, associated with the egg-throwers, the Trotskyites, the suffragettes and with all those others who aren't PLUs.

The result is that what we believe is still 'privatised', and dignified as being the real thing, while what we do is held at arms' length.

So instead of this deep divide between what we believe and what we do, let me try out on you a different pairing; between what we are and how we express it; between our true nature as baptised persons, made in the image and likeness of God, and how our divine nature – who we really, really are – is expressed in how we behave, how we act and the kind of relationships we form.

In other words, I want to link who we believe we are with how this is experienced by those we work amongst, meet with and makes friends with.

As you can see, I'm after that indefinable something that's an expression of who we are. It's not essentially about what we do, which criteria we satisfy or which boxes we tick, or even what the list of our achievements are, as if we were updating our CV every few seconds. Most of us spend most of our time doing pretty unexceptional stuff. We peel the potatoes and wash up; we drive to work or to Tesco's; we go to church and to the children's or grandchildren's sports day: we catch the train, buy presents and order drinks in the bar. Occasionally, we – or some of us – may tend the garden, take a funeral or preach a sermon.

But what tells people about our character, about what sort of a person we are, is HOW we do these things. Do you drive considerately and carefully? Do you take a funeral as if everyone there was your most cherished friend? Do you go to church joyfully or dutifully? Do you buy presents with care and delight, or with a sense of a chore that needs to be done? It's the adverbs that give us away, and reveal who we really are.

Are we Christians on paper, or to the core? Is what we do an expression of who we are or an impression that we are trying to create? 'The Pharisees,' says Jesus, 'love salutations in the market place and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts.' [Mk 12.39/40]

So how do we do it right? Concentrate on the effect we wish to produce or on the formation of the heart? You don't need me to tell you which is the genuine article; and there is no substitute for holiness of life. That's not a recipe for a sort cut, or a pious cop-out. The formation of the Christian community in disciplined habits of generosity and self-giving isn't a soft option: it's what we are about to re-learn all over again from the bottom up in Lent. Because Lent is essentially about re-learning the painful process of growing up. And that's the invitation to us in this meeting today as we slowly, thoughtfully, joyfully and creatively submit ourselves to the process of being remade in the divine image in this Eucharist today – spaced out to embrace all that we have to offer to and share with one another.

You may think that all this is a bit fanciful, and no substitute for getting down to brass tacks. 'Just tell us what to do, Bishop, and we'll do it' is a comment I've heard many times in the past 17 years. But I don't know what you should do. I don't know just what skills each of you have and just what opportunities are before you. But what I do know is that if you are rooted and grounded in the living Christ, the way you do anything will mark you out as a person or as a community or as a church that is living the gospel. And that's what's attractive.

'Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred with it.' [Prov 15.17] Or, as the Chief Executive of a local business said at a meeting yesterday, 'When we do appraisals these days, we don't ask people what they've done, we ask them how they've done it.'

So how can we turn the church outwards? I've three suggestions:

- By celebrating the sacrifice of the eucharist whenever possible, and not capitulating to those who can't cope with the challenge to embody a joyful and sacrificial way of living.
- By cherishing our ties of friendship with our brothers and sisters in the Sudan; our links with the church there is the best thing about this diocese.
- By patterning ourselves so that it's second nature, that it's not what we do, but how we do it that counts out there.

And as a practical suggestion for how we might put these into practice, I want to tell you the idea that I have for Lent.

It's this. Bishop Gwynne College – the major theological college of southern Sudan – was originally founded in 1948 in Mundri, but was moved to Juba in 1987 due to the civil war. Its role is to provide pastors to teach and train others in the Episcopal Church of the Sudan. The Church lent BGC a building originally built for a Mission and local houses were procured for students and staff, but the war and shortages all took their toll, and the College had fallen into a state of disrepair and poor management.

A year ago Archbishop Daniel Deng closed BGC, and invited Canon Trevor Stubbs, then of Bridport, to undertake the re-establishment of the college's teaching, followed by new buildings and an expansion of its mission on a self-financing basis. The

original building has now been adapted and upgraded, and 20 students are due to begin their studies again this month.

However, Archbishop Daniel needs the New BGC to take an additional 25 new residential students each year, which means expansion to a new site is critical. Trevor has found a perfect site next to Juba Model Secondary School and its sister primary schools. To secure it he needs to erect a substantial fencing, before debris from demolished buildings can be removed, existing buildings upgraded, one new building erected to house the chapel and library, and a water borehole and sanitation established as the first stage of development. Careful plans have been prepared and costed, and you can see them in the Sudan section of the diocesan website.

We hope that the full redevelopment can be complete and NBGC training 75 students by 2012. However the first phase, which they need now, will cost £66,000.

In my 17 years as bishop here I have never made a Lent Appeal or launched a specific appeal for the ECS or a project in Sudan, though I've supported the Medical Link regularly through my concerts. I've not wanted to undercut our ongoing commitment and support. However, as my time to leave you approaches, I have decided to ask you – both parishes and individuals – to work with me to raise the £66,000 they need. We need to do this as quickly as possible, but certainly by the end of June.

To enable this exciting and bold vision to take root would be the best farewell gift you could give me: it would be a lasting sign of our thanks to our brothers and sisters in Sudan for all they give to us, and of our commitment to teaching the teachers of the people of one of the fastest-growing churches in the world. Please continue to pray for them as they do for us.