

**Presidential address given to Salisbury Diocesan Synod by Dr Graham Kings**  
St Paul's Church Salisbury, Saturday 25 June 2011

In our passage for today, Acts 20:28-35, we hear of Paul, at Melitus, giving a deeply emotional farewell to the elders, the leaders of the church at Ephesus. He has been with them for 3 years and now commends them to God. He is on his way to Jerusalem with a collection from the Gentile Christians for the poor Jewish Christians. We know from his letters to the churches in Corinth and Rome that this collection involved at least three aspects: was a material gift of aid; a theological thank you for the good news of God in Christ, which came from the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem; and a profound sign of unity with them. It was so crucial, that Paul was willing to risk his life in delivering it.

In Acts 20: 22, Paul says: 'And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me.'

So the Holy Spirit is both leading him on in his risky mission and warning him of the consequences. He mentions the Holy Spirit again in verse 28:

Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

At the beginning of this season of Trinity, we see here, in one verse, the language for the later development of the doctrine of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit, the church of God (the Father) and the blood of his own Son.

The same leaders of the church are called elders in verse 17 and overseers in 22. From the Greek word for elders, we receive the words 'presbyter' and 'priest' and from the Greek word for 'overseers', we receive the word 'episcopal' and the concept of 'bishop'. At this early stage in the church of God, Paul uses both words for the same people. J B Lightfoot, the learned and godly Cambridge scholar and Bishop of Durham 1879-89, wrote in his essay on the Christian Ministry, which formed an appendix to his commentary on Philippians: The episcopate was formed not out of the apostolic order by localisation but out of the presbyteral by elevation: and the title which was originally common to all, came at length to be appropriated to the chief among them.

So there was development of orders from the beginning.

Paul urges them keep watch over their own spiritual condition as well as over all the flock.

We have been particularly blessed by God with bishops who have shepherded the Diocese of Salisbury with deep love and wisdom: Bishop David said farewell to us a year ago on 4 July; Bishop Stephen on 6 December and Bishop Christopher after Easter. These have all kept watch over themselves and over their flock, conscious of their calling by the Holy Spirit.

In particular, today, we give thanks to God for the shepherding of Bishop Christopher Herbert, the retired Bishop of St Albans, who served us all with such dedication and wisdom as Archbishop's Delegate from December to April. We are very grateful to God and to Bishop Christopher for the love and patient pastoral care he shared amongst us. The decision to stand down after Easter, following a heart murmur, was right, and he has recovered very well.

We also give thanks to God for the future shepherding of Bishop-elect Nicholas Holtam. This is a wonderful appointment, and I am grateful to all involved as Diocesan representatives, led by the Dean, on the Crown Nominations Committee. I am greatly looking forward to welcoming Nicholas and Helen. The name Nicholas means 'victory for the people of God'

Nick (victory) and Laos (People) and he is keen to include the people of God in his name rather than just victory.

Nicholas will be ordained and consecrated Bishop of Salisbury on Friday 22 July, at 11.00am at St Paul's Cathedral and all are welcome to the service. People may turn up on the day and enter without tickets and need to be seated by 10.40am. If clergy and licensed lay ministers wish to robe, please contact the Bishop's office at South Canonry by Monday 4 July.

Following consultation with Rural Deans and Lay Chairs and many others, a detailed induction programme is being worked on and will be published soon. Bishop-elect Nicholas wants to affirm what is already happening and longs get to know the Diocese mainly through Deanery visits. These will begin after the Enthronement and continue up to the beginning of July 2012.

We still await official confirmation, but hope that Bishop Nicholas's Enthronement at Salisbury Cathedral will be on Saturday 15 October at 11.30am. People have borne, with much patience, the long time of this vacancy, the relay of bishops and the juggling of various dates for the enthronement. The latter has been affected by finding a date for Bishop Nicholas to pay homage to Her Majesty the Queen.

I would like to give thanks to all the senior staff and the administrative staff, clergy and people in the parishes who have taken on extra burdens involved in all of this; and to ordinands, and to those about to be licensed as lay ministers, and organisers of diocesan groups who have had to adjust their diaries. Thanks to you all.

On the inside of your service sheet, you will find the names of those about to be licensed as lay workers tomorrow before being ordained deacon on 8 October and those to be ordained priest on 2 July. Do pray them and give thanks for the extraordinary ministry of Archdeacon Alan Jeans as Diocesan Director of Ordinands, especially in fostering younger vocations.

In the consultation concerning whether to appoint another Bishop of Ramsbury, we will be reviewing not only the post itself but the ways bishops and archdeacons work in the diocese, now that there is not an Area Scheme. The advisory group, chaired by the Dean, will be consulting widely to ask questions about what kind of senior leadership we need and want. All will have a chance to feed in their comments to the group which will advise Bishop Nicholas and prepare the case for the Dioceses Commission, if we decide to go ahead. For the first time we are answerable to Church of England as a whole, on this matter.

On 3 July, the day after the Ordination of Priests at the cathedral, I fly to Kenya for two days and on to Juba, to be with Archbishop Daniel Deng for the joyful Independence celebrations of South Sudan on 9 July.

Our 39 year Salisbury Sudan link is a crucial partnership and we will remain in partnership with the whole Episcopal Church of Sudan, which will cover the two new nations, north and south. The five dioceses in the north will especially need our prayers, as will the dioceses in the border areas.

On 14 June, Archbishop Daniel published the following [statement](#) on the violence in Southern Kordofan. As we remember the events of the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of the early church about persecution and pressure, let us hear this today:

On behalf of all the Christians of Southern Kordofan and the Nuba people, I wish to condemn the violence and bombardment of civilian settlements since June 5, which has resulted in widespread suffering and destruction. From the time the initial fighting began, it has been reported that the number of civilians requiring immediate relief has increased to over 53,000 and is set to rise, bombing and looting has continued,

75,000 people have been displaced, and houses and other buildings have been torched and deliberately destroyed.

The Episcopal Church of the Sudan has not escaped the effects of violence and destruction. Some of our pastors have been arrested and tortured without reason or charge. The windows and doors of the ECS Guest House and All Saints Cathedral Kadugli have been broken. The altar, vestments, church documents in the cathedral and the official residence of the Bishop have been destroyed by fire. Our solar panels, gifted to us by generous partners and three motorcycles have been stolen. Secular buildings have also been damaged and indeed all people, both Christian and Muslim have been impacted by the fighting. However, the church and its personnel have clearly been a target for the Northern army since the fighting began. The calculated damage to our church buildings and the threats to, and arrest and torture of, pastors and known Christians because of their faith is indisputable.

Without a doubt then, the most worrying aspect of this recent conflict is the way in which fighting that originated between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) has now transformed into what can only be described as a deliberate strategy to rid Kadugli of its indigenous African and Christian population by the SAF, in short a policy of ethnic cleansing.

So these are the birth pangs of two new nations and we pray that the same Holy Spirit who strengthened St Paul in persecution empowers and protects Archbishop Daniel, his clergy and his people.

When the Episcopal Church of Sudan voted on women in the ordained ministry they decided to vote simultaneously on women deacons, priests and bishops and passed the vote. At the tomb on Easter Day, Mary Magdalene was the first to encounter the risen Christ, and she was sent by him to go to witness to the other disciples. The Greek word for 'send' is the root of the word 'apostle'.

It was very encouraging to hear of the Board of Education's listening process with young people in schools in the diocese on the principle of women bishops and their positive response. Listening to children and young people is becoming central to our mission as a diocese.

In the Church of England, this principle of women in the episcopate has been decided and now we come to vote on this particular legislation.

For many years I have longed for women to be consecrated as bishops. I was impressed with the debate on this legislation last November in our Diocesan Synod and with the way the Rural Deans and Lay Chairs have facilitated the Deanery Synod debates. I profoundly believe that this legislation it is the best way forward, and that it also provides for those who disagree with women in the episcopate, through a code of practice.

We have 3 petitioning parishes in the Diocese, who disagree with the ordination of women, and this month I attended the consecration of Bishop Jonathan Baker, the new Bishop of Ebbsfleet, whom I have known from the Liturgical Commission and with whom I look forward to working.

In his book, *Choice Desire and the Will of God* (SPCK, 2003), David Runcorn writes wisely: The question 'What decision is God guiding me to make?' is part of a much bigger and more important question: 'What kind of person is God willing that I may become?' (p 57) For us today, the key question is: 'What kind of church is God willing that the Church of England may become?'

David Runcorn continues later:

Waiting tests our desires. The Bible is full of exhortations to 'wait'. The real and deep desire will endure and even deepen through waiting. Passing enthusiasm will be seen for what they were. (p 91)

Women in the episcopate is not a passing enthusiasm but a real and profound desire in the Church of England which has endured and deepened through waiting. Now is the time to vote.

In Acts 20:32, Paul commends the church at Ephesus to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build up and give the inheritance among all who are sanctified.

I believe that today this includes the Holy Spirit's calling of women to be bishops.