

Diocesan Synod 3 November 2012: Presidential Address

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”
[*Philippians 2.5*]

That’s a pretty good text from which to begin the life of a new Diocesan Synod as we begin working together: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” and to think about that Philippians Christ-hymn as a way of helping to root us in our shared and common life within the faith and life and spirit of Jesus Christ.

The Presidential Addresses at Diocesan Synods aren’t really sermons; they are presidential addresses, but I do want to root us as a Synod in that life of Christ.

I want to thank Amesbury Baptist Church for having us- that’s a significant bit of ecumenism in itself, that clearly this is a diocese where it feels perfectly at ease with coming to a Baptist Church because the plant’s good and it works and will serve us well and will help us to do our business, so I’m really grateful for that and glad that this is something we’re able to do for our Saturday sessions of Synod.

I am conscious that there is business to do at Synod and that I’m going to have the opportunity to present some reflections from my first year as the Bishop as part of the business, but there are some things which need to be said before we begin, as it were, and to say them now.

You will all know I’m delighted that Ruth Worsley has accepted an invitation to become Archdeacon of Wilts. She was ordained in the Diocese of Southwell, and is a former area dean in Nottingham and Dean of Women’s Ministry in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham before becoming parish development officer in Southwark Diocese. I hope that she and Howard will move here in February- their kids are at the age where they’ve just moved out, really- but their home will be in Devizes and I hope that they’ll move in January and that she’ll begin in very early February and details will follow in due course.

It’s a real gift for me to be talking about the personality and character of the diocese on the day when the Church of England remembers Richard Hooker, Rector of St Andrews Boscombe from 1591 to 1595, which is where he wrote the first four volumes of ‘The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity’. He and Bishop John Jewel, Bishop of this diocese, were the principal architects of the post-Reformation identity of the Church of England.

Hooker expounded an Anglican middle way, making use of the three authorities of Scripture, tradition and reason. Archbishop Rowan calls this “an unselfconscious agreement about the governing lines of classical doctrine, a willingness to see these as simply the basic map of the territory the Christian lives in.” (RW, Anglican Identities.)

So it’s a great, great day to be thinking about our personality and character as a diocese, and to recognise that Hooker, a Rector of this diocese, provided the map with which we all work.

There’s been a bit of discussion among the three bishops and we’re learning to become a new team and we’ve enjoyed talking about Richard Hooker. Bishop Ed pointed out that Hooker talks about a “harmonious dissimilitude” and he also talks about the teachers and saints of the Church are “even as so many sparkles resembling the bright fountain from which they rise.” Well, we’ll try. But it’s a good day for us to be talking about the character of the diocese and the personality of the diocese and for me as the new diocesan bishop to be asking us to talk, engage, think and articulate our priorities as local churches.

“New lamps be lit new tasks begun”

This is a Synod in which some ‘new lamps will be lit and new tasks begun’- it’s a wonderful hymn of George Bell’s, a former Bishop of Chichester- and among those new tasks and new lamps, the

Archdeacon of Sarum is going to be leading in a new role that will encourage and support the development of new models of ministry and mission; to grow in numbers and depth, we need to be innovative: there's no choice. This is part of re-imagining ministry and mission, seeking to proclaim the Christian faith afresh in this generation, so Alan Jeans will be presenting a proposal which I very much hope we'll agree to, just as one part of the experiment that's needed in order for us to be a growing and lively church today.

Similarly, I am convinced that at this stage in the Church's life, what we need are lots of energetic, controlled experiments. I don't mean controlled in the sense of 'there's a heavy hand around them', but where we've just put some limits and frameworks and we can see what happens and where we're able to experiment and learn together about what works in the life of the Church. So I'm really pleased that the Revd David Harknett has agreed from 2nd January to take on a part-time role in place of the school chaplaincy that he's been doing as a Team Vicar in the Melbury Team, to co-ordinate and develop the work of energising local ministry: and that's an experiment that's begun in five benefices already. It pre-dates me as Bishop, but we're trying to get a sense of 'how do we learn and grow with this together?' I'm very grateful for David taking on that role.

There is a strong commitment within the diocese and within the Church for social justice, as well as for charity, so today's presentation from Christian Aid about Tax Justice is part of that. This work takes place primarily in the context of the local church, but it probably needs more co-ordination from us as a diocese, so the Archdeacon of Sherborne has been chairing a working party to explore this, and they're wanting to consult widely, and to do a little survey. It won't be a huge piece of work, but it will require responses from all parishes in order to lead into a presentation at the February Synod. The Archdeacon of Sherborne is not here today- he sends his apologies- but Colin Brady is, and Colin's been part of the working party, so if you're wanting to ask about it, Colin will be the person to ask. Otherwise, it'll come out in the next week or so, and I'd be very grateful for people responding.

[Click here for more details: www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/bishops/the-bishop-of-salisbury/let-us-talk/#christians-in-the-community]

[Click here for the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SocialResponsibilityConsultation>]

Salisbury-Sudan Link

The Salisbury-Sudan Link has got real life and energy within it. It's gained extraordinary momentum, I think. At the moment, Jim Findlay, the parish priest at St Mark's Salisbury and Tim Storey, the Rector of Blandford Forum, are near the completion of a month's teaching in Mundri and they'll be returning home this coming week from that month in the Sudan. Some of you will be following their progress on the diocesan website.

[Click here for more: www.salisbury.anglican.org/news/tim-and-jim-in-sudan]

Their visit as part of the Salisbury-Sudan Link has been greatly valued, as was the visit of Bishop Andudu, Bishop of Kadugli, an area covering the Nuba mountains on the border of Sudan and South Sudan where almost 100,000 people have fled because of the bombing and fighting taking place there. During his visit, there was a very well-attended Sudan Study Day to which 120 people came- I think that's really impressive- on a Saturday just under a month ago.

[Click here for more: www.salisbury.anglican.org/mission/the-sudan-link/sudan-link-study-day]

There are now ten Deanery-to-Diocese links and two more are developing. There's been a group of five to the Diocese of Kajo-Keji, and Purbeck Deanery are going shortly to make an exploratory visit to Torit and Terrakeka. At the end of this month, our Dean June and Bishop Ed are going to lead training for the Cathedral Deans in the Province of the Sudan.

Now, with all that energy, next year is the 40th anniversary of the Salisbury-Sudan Link and so we're beginning to make plans for an event which I think will take place in June. We'll have a Salisbury-Sudan week when we mark the 40th anniversary and to celebrate the partnership that's grown between the churches.

General Synod and the Ordination of Women to the Episcopate

General Synod's coming up and on the 20th of November, Tuesday 20th November, General Synod will be voting on the final approval of the Measure for the Consecration of Women Bishops. The bit that I wanted reported- 'the Bishop said'- is, *"it's high time we got on with this. Our credibility as a Church is on the line. Our credibility as a national Church is on the line, so we'd better do it"*. But I think I'd better spell out just what's involved so we get the sense of what the process is that we're caught up in. I don't expect this detail to be reported or that you'll hold onto it, however you might just want to note the dates as we go through.

In the light of the last July Synod's discussion, the House of Bishops' meeting in September further revised the draft Measure. In doing this, I think I want to report a remarkable convergence within the House of Bishops, and Bishop Graham and Bishop Ed and I felt really encouraged that the way ahead seemed to be coming with a degree of unanimity about this. Not total, but much stronger than had been experienced before over any issue in the House of Bishops. So I'm hopeful that the General Synod will be able to secure two-thirds majorities for this Measure in each of the Houses- Lay, Clergy and Bishops.

It's not in the bag, and we'll need to work hard for it and make the case. If Final Approval is secured, the Measure will go to the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, where it can be expected to be debated and approved by both Houses early in the New Year. After it's received Royal Assent, and the necessary provisions of the Measure have been brought into force by the Archbishop- we will need an Archbishop to do this- the House of Bishops meeting in May will be able to make the Code of Practice and consider the terms of a draft Act of Synod to rescind the 1993 Act of Synod.

This is a critical part of the process because those remaining objections to the Measure focus on the legal meaning of the word 'respect' in the amended clause 5 (1) c in relation to the as yet only indicative draft of the Code of Practice. It is expected the Code of Practice will be put to the General Synod in July 2013- so July next year- for approval and it then could be committed back to the House of Bishops under Article 7 business. I'm new at this as well. It's open to the House of Bishops to make such further amendments as it saw fit- but in the light of previous experience we might have learned the lesson- before returning them to the General Synod for Final Approval.

The earliest possible date for the consecration of the first woman bishop in the Church of England will be 2014 and with the great majority of this Diocese I look forward to it. As a Diocese we- and I- are also committed to the care of the small minority who are unable to see this as a welcome development and have promised a generous and gracious working of the implications and the Code of Practice here in Salisbury.

The Measure requires me, as Diocesan Bishop, to make and publish a scheme containing arrangements for the diocese. So, if General Synod approves the Measure, and if all the other things happen in the first half of next year through to July, there will be discussion at this Diocesan Synod about the implementation of the Measure.

I realise that may be clear as mud, but remember the timescale, and I think there is now a clear and critical path for this to go through, and I really hope that the General Synod in November does its stuff.

ACC and the Church in Nigeria

You might be aware that the Anglican Consultative Council is meeting at the moment in Auckland in New Zealand, and will be meeting until the 7th of November. I want you to note that its Nigerian members have called on the members of the Anglican Communion around the world to pray, fast and act in support of our brothers and sisters in Nigeria facing violence and death. One of them said, "We have a week of prayer and fasting from the 12th of November for the terrible security situation in Nigeria." The Archbishop Nwosu asked us to join with them in that week of prayer, and

I'll ask you as a Synod, and I'll ask the Diocese, to make a point of doing that from the 12th to the 19th of November.

Awaiting the announcement of a new Archbishop of Canterbury

Lastly, we are awaiting the announcement of a new Archbishop of Canterbury. The process for the appointment of our new Archbishop has been widely reported and I know no more than is public. That's good news for me and it's good news for us, and this is a job- well, it's not a job to be sought, is it? And- it's an important job to be done. So we look forward to hearing who is appointed and to working with them, whoever it is.

Archbishop Rowan said when he announced that he was standing down that whoever succeeds him will need the constitution of an ox and the hide of a rhinoceros! Whoever's appointed will face a heavy burden of expectation from the Anglican Communion as well as from the Church of England and from the Diocese of Canterbury. And we will all want him to play a role in our national life. There is no question that organisational reforms are needed in order for the person appointed to be able to do that, and in my opinion, those reforms will have to extend to the Church as a whole and not just the office and role of the Archbishop. I'm grateful to a number of people in this Diocese who are contributing to the thinking about this and I hope that those thoughts will eventually lead to action.

It's not a Synodical process; it's a process in which a great many people are engaged nationally and internationally, and it seems to me that Salisbury- some people from Salisbury- have made a significant contribution to the process which won't be able to go anywhere until the new person is announced and in place, but I'm sure something is going to have to happen in terms of organisational reform and reform of the role of Archbishop. I hope so.

So, I think that's all in terms of what inevitably feels like Headmaster's notices. It's meant to give people- all of you- a handle on what's going on, what we're thinking about, what needs praying for, what's the common business for which we have a responsibility.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" in all you think, and speak, and do.

Amen.