

Presidential Address to Diocesan Synod

13 June 2013

We meet in a week when we are marking 40 years of the Salisbury-Sudan Link. We welcome 11 Bishops of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan

Bishop Francis Loyo	Diocese of Rokon
Bishop Ezekiel Kondo	Diocese of Khartoum
Bishop Bismark Avokaya	Diocese of Mundri
Bishop Justin Badi	Diocese of Marida
Bishop Moses Deng	Diocese of Wau
Bishop Stephen Dokolo	Diocese of Lui
Bishop Hilary Garang	Diocese of Malakal
Bishop Elijah Matueny	Diocese of Cueibet
Bishop Bernard Oringa	Diocese of Torit
Bishop Samuel Peni	Diocese of Nzara
Bishop Anthony Poggo	Diocese of Kajo-Keji

We also welcome the Provincial Secretary Mr John Augustino.

Bishop Graham is shortly going to give a report of the Conference but I want us to note that the Link began here in our Diocesan Synod in March 1973. We agreed to form a permanent link of friendship with the Diocese of the Sudan in which informed prayer would lead to informed giving. By common consent it has become one of the best links within the Anglican Communion and 120 people have attended the conference that has taken place over the last two days. This is work done with a number of partners represented at the conference: AFRECS (American Friends of the Episcopal Church of the Sudan), Sudan Church Association, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development, Christian Aid, Tearfund, CMS, US (formerly USPG), SOMA, MAF, and the Mothers Union.

There have been many changes over the last 40 years. The Episcopal Church of the Sudan is now a Province with 31 Dioceses. The Sudan has become two countries the Republic of the Sudan and the South Sudan. The nature of the Link has grown and developed. We have become a Partnership which implies hospitality and meeting face to face, listening to each other, praying for and with one another in a global church where we are seeking to become 'cross cultural Christians'.

The practical nature of our diocesan link has focussed on the educational, medical and the need for advocacy to support peace and security to end conflict in Sudan and South Sudan. To this has been added Deanery to Diocese links which have begun to flourish. Very many more people from the Diocese of Salisbury are now visiting the South Sudan. In these changing circumstances the Archbishop of the Sudan has asked for us to develop a Memorandum of Understanding which will for the first time, set out a written basis for the Partnership. The link is in very good heart and the principles which undergird it look clearer after the Conference. We will be developing a document that will come back to Synod for discussion and approval.

The ECS does not have women bishops but they did have the foresight to agree at the same time to the ordination of women deacons, priests and bishops.

Women Bishops

Following the failure of the Measure for Final Approval last November at General Synod, the House of Bishops have put forward new proposals to be discussed at General Synod in July. There is a new urgency and determination of tone but it is genuinely difficult to produce something that we can be sure will do what the clear and substantial majority of the Church of England now want and believe to be of God whilst also honouring the place of those Anglicans who disagree. As Summary Paper has been produced for this meeting and I want to thank our Diocesan Secretary for doing this. The full Report is easily available on the Web.

A Working Party was established under the Chairmanship of the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Their Report has been published in full. At the same time, there was a facilitated process to mediate the different parties holding strong and divergent views on this issue. The House of Bishops have encouraged a similar process to take place in General Synod. Though this necessarily has to be shorter, the whole of one day will be given to it before discussing the specific legislative proposals. Of the four options put forward by the Working Party, which are in reality a spectrum, the House of Bishops is not able to commend Option 4. Option 1 has the strongest support from the House of Bishops.

I will be inviting comment when we come to this item. Our General Synod members would welcome feedback both tonight and up to the General Synod meeting 5-9 July.

Same Sex Marriage

The Marriage (same sex couples) Bill has, at its Second Reading, received large majorities in both Houses of Parliament. I am not a member of the House of Lords but my own views are well known to differ from the vast majority of Bishops and the official statements of the Church of England on this matter. I was therefore asked, with the blessing of the Archbishop, to state why I am sympathetic to the possibility of same sex marriage, giving voice to the variety of views that exists within the Church of England.

Since both Houses of Parliament have now expressed a clear view by large majorities on the principle that there should be legislation to enable same sex marriages to take place in England and Wales, has led the Bishop of Leicester as Convenor of the Lords Spiritual to say that it is now the duty and responsibility of the Bishops who sit in the House of Lords to recognise the implications of this decision and to join with other Members in considering how this legislation can be put into better shape.

As you know, the legislation provides specific and robust exemption to faith communities, including the Church of England where our practice will not change. However the changes in society on this issue have been massive within our lifetime and we can expect that the conversation will have to continue. Our intention as a Diocesan Synod has always to been to wait for the Pilling Report to the House of Bishops, which is likely to be published early next year, before bringing this matter to the Diocesan Synod.

Finance

At a Diocesan Synod at which we are also holding the Annual General Meeting of the Diocesan Board of Finance I want to thank Gil Williams, the Chair, and the Board as well as our Diocesan Secretary and Accountant for all that they do to keep our finances in such good order. We all know that it depends on the giving of Christians throughout the Diocese but the confidence it is given by such a well run Board is encouraging. Very many thanks to them.

New Ministries

At this Synod we are Licensing Colin Brady to act as Social Justice Programme Manager within the Diocese, not just to work in Dorset as previously. It is part of a new emphasis and style of work in support of the Social Justice agenda that has been agreed through Synod. We are also licensing the Revd Penelope Joyce in support of the Archdeacon of Sarum's role developing new models of Ministry for Mission, a post funded through the generosity of an individual to whom we are very grateful indeed.

Ordinations

We are looking forward to the Ordinations of priests at 5.30pm on Saturday 29 June and deacons at 10.30am on Sunday 30 June. They are always marvellous services, encouraging to the particular individuals and churches where they will serve but also to the whole church in the diocese as people begin a new ordained ministry with and among us in the name of Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory now and forever.

Amen