

15th November 2014, Diocesan Synod: Presidential Address

There is an environmental focus to part of this Synod's Agenda. Thanks to Jonathan Still for leading the worship. It is a happy coincidence that I have recently taken on the role of 'lead bishop' for environmental matters. In thinking about where to start I am clear it is with prayer and spirituality. Nothing will happen without that as the basis of what we do. The reading from Isaiah is a vision of how the world might be with our relationships restored with God, one another the creation: The wolf shall lie down with the lamb... and a little child shall lead them. (Isa. 11.6-9)

We have just been through the season of Remembrance, particularly poignant this year a century after the start of the First World War.

In September Pope Francis said that the number of conflicts being waged around the globe effectively amount to "a piecemeal Third World War". Last year there were some 400 conflicts worldwide, 20 of them wars¹. The United Nations has reported that the number of people who have been forced to flee their homes by conflict and crisis has risen to over 50 million for the first time since WWII. Half of those forced to flee are children.

If the last century was defined in some ways by the First World War, it ended with the very considerable hope of the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of Apartheid and some very significant movements that suggested new patterns of global relationships, such as Make Poverty History and Drop the Debt.

This 21st century is being defined by the terrorism of 9/11 2001 and by the responses to it. This includes the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as what has happened across the Middle East and now particularly in Syria and Iraq with ISIS.

In the cathedral on Armistice Day, the discussion after a talk on war and peace focussed on the need for a just peace which is so much more than the absence of war. It begins with prayer and spirituality which helps us towards that integration of self in which who we are and what we do are one.

Last week the Jesuit Fr Gerry W Hughes died in Bournemouth. He was one of the great spiritual guides of our generation. His best known book 'God of Surprises' sold over 250,000 copies. In his last book, published in October, he said:

"We are in a severe crisis today, not just of the church, but of the whole human race. We have seen wonderful technical development, but we have become unhinged. We have lost the link between the words we use and what we actually do. It's a most vicious illness: it faces us with annihilation."²

You can see this in the way we have fought for freedom and the rule of law but are unable to deal with terrorism by those same principles. Guantanamo Bay still holds 148 detainees who may be difficult people but have not been dealt with justly. This is a very significant challenge when next June we will be marking the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta about which Judge Keith Cutler says, "The important thrust of Magna Carta is to establish that we are all subject to law, that justice must be accessible to all and that all are entitled to a fair trial."³

¹ The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research.

² Gerard W Hughes, Cry of Wonder, London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014.

³ Keith Cutler in Sarah Rickett, Magna Carta: Charter of Liberties – an educational resource for 11-14 year olds, Salisbury Cathedral, 2012.

Because of Magna Carta, the 'Lonely Planet' travel guides have made Salisbury next year's 7th top place in the world to visit. On the day this was announced, one of the papers interviewed Colin, 55, in 'The Haunch Of Venison'. He liked the beer and moving to Salisbury was the best thing he'd done. He said, "It's got to be up there with Norwich."

The cathedral has organised a marvellous programme of events to mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. On Sunday 14th June in the afternoon there will be a Diocesan Pilgrimage from Old Sarum to the cathedral for Evensong. There will be more publicity in the New Year, but I hope that parishes and schools will come in large numbers.

We already know a month before that there will be a General Election, on Thursday 7th May. It would be good for churches to start thinking about holding hustings and encouraging people to vote. The Diocesan Secretary will distribute guidelines to help and make sure we keep within electoral law. It seems so odd that we say we value democracy highly yet the turnout in elections has become so low. There is a problem with our civic life about which there is a strange mixture of apathy, anger and cynicism but not much idealism, vision and hope. The continuing pressures of austerity following such a long and deep economic downturn are very apparent. The Church can help people think about the common good, not just what is best for me, and to hold a global view rather than pretend everything would be better in a difficult world if we turn inwards. Our relationship with Europe is clearly a key issue. Whatever its faults, the European project has contributed to the longest period of peace we have known. In the light of today's agenda I hope we might also remind our politicians of the importance of the environment and that the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment.

Our Diocesan partnerships are one of the ways in which we are given a larger view of the world. They have helped us to grow as Christians and each is distinctive. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Evreux in France and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia give ecumenical insight as well as with old and new members of the European Union. That with the Episcopal Church of the South Sudan and Sudan is with Anglicans in one of the poorest and most troubled parts of the world. They are the fault line between Christianity and Islam and the South Sudan has been damaged in the last year by terrible internal conflicts in which tens of thousands have been killed, 1.4 million have been displaced from their homes and up to 4 million facing hunger.

The evidence that the link matters greatly is in the quality of relationships and commitment of people over many years. This year we have worked particularly closely with Christian Aid with whom Robert Hayward has been based in South Sudan. Some Deanery visits have recently been possible once again. A group from Devizes and the Chalke Valley went to Kajo Keji. The Diocese took delivery of a new truck which was a gift from Devizes. It was used immediately put to use by moving groups of people from fighting at the border to safety. Two weeks ago Canon Ian Woodward helped Chair a meeting of the Joint Peace and Reconciliation Committee organised by +Samuel Penni. Mike McLaughlin has just returned from what sounds to have been a successful visit on behalf of the Medical link. In this context we can be hopeful about Bishop Graham's visit to their House of Bishops next week. He is taking a draft Memorandum of Understanding which we hope will provide a framework for the continuing relationship. Please remember him in your prayers.

The need for a Memorandum of Understanding is for similar reasons to the Church of England's commitment to 'Shared Conversations' about issues in sexuality and particularly same sex relationships. In September the College of Bishops piloted the process which will be undertaken by representatives of each Diocese gathered into regional groups. We will be invited to contribute 12 people to this process. They will need to be male and female, lay and ordained, of varied age and

theological views, gay and straight, and willing and able to give a weekend to take part in the process. It is going to be a tall order to identify the people and get the right mix to help the Church towards what Archbishop Justin hopes in Christian charity will be 'good disagreement'. It would also be helpful if a few of the 12 were likely to be members of General Synod when the matter comes there in July 2016. In order to help me identify who will take part as representatives from this Diocese, I would be grateful for expressions of interest to be sent to me including a brief CV and an indication of what you think you would contribute to the process.

That is a helpful prompt to point out that the present General Synod which meets on Monday and Tuesday of next week but ends next July. Elections will follow in September. We are well served by our present members whom I thank warmly for their contributions. I hope this Diocese will elect representatives who will give time both to the work of General Synod and to making the links back into this Diocese. They will need to work on a broad range of issues affecting the life of Church and Nation, of which same sex relationships will be only one. It would be good if you started looking for people who might be willing to offer themselves for election. Please remember, and make sure the matter is known in your churches, that the electorate is only Deanery Synod members.

Tomorrow at Evensong in the Cathedral we will be giving thanks for 20 years of women's ministry in the Church of England and the Diocese of Salisbury. The preacher will be Canon Jane Lloyd who was one of the first women ordained priest in Salisbury 20 years ago. Now, 42% - 144 - of our clergy are female including the Dean, a Residentiary Canon, Archdeacon and Director of Ministry, 3 Rural Deans and 3 Assistant Rural Deans, 21 incumbents... We will be giving thanks for their ministry on the eve of the measure for the ordination of women as bishops becoming law on Monday. So we will move towards Advent and renewed hope. Thanks be to God.