

## **Diocesan Synod 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2014**

### **Presidential Address by the Bishop of Coventry**

#### **Introduction**

In my address to the June Synod I attempted to give a brief review of where we are as a Diocese in terms of our strategic development, and to set that within the context of the life of the Church of England as a whole. I am not going to try anything as systematic as that today but I thought it worth giving an update on some developments in the diocese and, again, to set them in the context of the life of the Church of England as a whole.

#### **The admittance of women to the Episcopate**

As everyone will know, I am sure, the long road towards removing any canonical barriers to the admittance of women to the episcopate was concluded last Monday at the General Synod. It was an understated moment that completed a process that has been demanding and costly for many people in the life of the Church, whatever their theological views. I would like to pay tribute to many clergy and laity across the diocese who have shown remarkable patience and graciousness as the debate took its course. I think we can be justifiably pleased with the way we have, as a diocese, steered ourselves through the last few years, and I am especially grateful to the Bishop's Advisory Commission on whose advice I have relied.

It is time to rejoice that the Church will now be able to receive the episcopal ministry of women and that it has also found ways of – largely – holding together under the Five Principals of the House of Bishop's Declaration which seek the mutual flourishing of all in the Church.

In our own diocese Katrina Scott has played a key part not only in encouraging women priests through what has been, at times, a stressful experience but also in encouraging sensible, sensitive debate and, most importantly, helping us to pray at each key stage of the process. This is Katrina's Synod and there will be an opportunity for us to say our farewells at the conclusion of our business today. I am glad to say that the post of Dean of Women's Ministry will continue, though we are hoping to take the opportunity to enlarge the role to include other categories of people whose ministries – present or potential – are in danger of being marginalised.

Before moving on, may I confirm that, following the invitation to which I referred at the last Synod, Bishop Jonathan Goodall, agreed to become an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese and that he now has that role which will give him – and me – more of a sense that he ministers from within our life rather than, as it were, coming to us from beyond our life together.

### **Re-shaping and re-tooling the Church**

In my June address I referred to a number of Task Groups that had been set up to help re-shape and re-tool the Church of England for its missionary task. A great deal of work has happened at national level in each of the Groups and they will soon be taking their recommendations through the various processes of the Church. Now is not the right point to summarise their analysis but it is worth saying that, as far as I can see, they mirror in a rather remarkable way a great deal of what we are trying to do in this diocese. I said at joint meeting of the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishop's Standing Committee on Wednesday that I found this alignment of local and national priorities very encouraging and exciting.

One thrust of their work has been to make more funding available for the strategic mission of the Church. In a similar way, our Bishop's Council set up a strategic task group to consider how our own assets might be used more effectively to resource our own missionary endeavour. That work is still going on but I thought you should know that it is happening.

An example of this coming together of local and national initiatives is the strategic development funding that has already been made available by the Church Commissions and for which we have put in a bid of £623,000. It has three aspects: to improve our capacity to mentor church communities in healthy church principles, to increase our missional reach and growth to younger adults and to help parishes, especially those in deprived areas, to address their least healthy quality areas by the application of a small grants scheme.

The title of the bid is *Acceler8* and we will hear by mid-December whether we have been approved to go through to the second, much more detailed round of applications. Please pray for all that lies ahead.

I am very grateful to Morris Rodham for his hard work structuring the bid and having a series of detailed consultations about it.

The bid is made on the basis of considerable funding also being contributed by the diocese and Bishop's Council is committed to moving forward in each area even if we did not receive the funding, albeit it at much slower pace.

### **Together for Change**

If what I have just said relates very closely to one of the Church of England's quinquennial goals of, I put it in June, re-growing the Church numerically and spiritually, another development in the diocese corresponds closely with another national goal – that of recommitment to the common good of the nation.

This is the work of Together for Change charity that we have established in partnership with the Church Urban Fund. Our new Transforming Communities Together Officer, Jet Jones, has been working for us for a few months now and is already making an impact across the diocese. She spoke to all clergy at the Bishop's Study Day about the work of Together for Change which we hope will act as a catalyst and a support to diocesan strategy in fulfilling our Transforming Communities agenda. We are intending to focus on 4 or 5 deprived geographical areas, 2 or 3 theme based approaches across the Diocese, web based mapping and resources, and supporting smaller scale transformation projects in churches across the Diocese.

Jet is currently involved in a number of potential project negotiations, is gathering information to put on the web-based support, and has also sent letters to all incumbents of parishes in the lowest 25% of deprivation in the Diocese for expressions of interest in being one of the geographical priority areas. We have also taken on board some initial feedback about Transforming Communities in Rural Areas, and one outcome of that already is some thinking about how we can help link churches and local schools in meeting the pastoral needs of both children and parents in rural areas via volunteer chaplaincies.

An historic part of the Church of England's work for the common good of all in our country been its educational activity, especially through its school. The educational landscape continues to change

and throws up repeated challenges. I am hugely impressed with the energy and agility of our diocesan education team in all its forms as it seeks not only to respond to immediate demands but also to keep ahead of the curve.

We now have nine of our church schools as part of the Diocesan multi-academy trust with discussions in progress with others who wish to join and I have enjoyed attending a number of events to make conversion to academy status. Keeping up with these developments would be quite enough on its own but I am extremely glad to say that Rex Pogson, Linda Wainscot, David Morris are also exploring how we might seize the opportunities new housing developments in the diocese bring to grow our church school family.

### **Other developments**

There are some other matters that are also worth reporting to Synod.

First, Offa House: The Bishop's Council continues to work with me and with Bishop John to discern the way ahead for Offa House. I am really delighted that it has been re-opened for prayer and that a regular pattern of prayer has been grown. I hope that we will be able to give Offa a long term sustainable future and I look forward to be in position to say more in the near future.

Second, the Cathedral: A full team of clergy are now in place with the arrival of Sarah Hills as Canon for Reconciliation Ministry (replacing David Porter who is now seconded to the Archbishop for 100% of his time) and Stephen Fielding as Canon Treasurer (who has picked up the senior administrator's responsibilities which have been covered by others since the previous Executive Director left in mid 2012). Although significant progress has been made, the team still face tough challenges both financially and with the buildings.

Third, the DBF: Some members of Synod will be aware that there are currently a number of opportunities for the Glebe Committee to develop some of our land holdings. This has led to several conversations with incumbents and PCCs who have had to wrestle with the dilemma of how to do the right thing for both present and future residents of their parishes. I am grateful to all who have engaged in these discussions.

## **Bishops' wider commitments**

Finally, may I say something about some of the wider commitments into which Bishop John and I have found ourselves drawn. A little while ago the Archbishops invited Bishop John to become the Anglican Co-Chair of the Rully Conversations between the French Protestant Churches and the Anglican Churches in France. This significant ecumenical responsibility adds to Bishop John's important role on the international commission of the Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue which recently took Bishop John to Jerusalem.

Bishop John has also been active in responding to the increasingly distressing situation in Syria and Irak. I too have been quite closely involved in this area through my role as Lead Bishop for Foreign Affairs in the House of Lords and as a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Freedom of Religion and Belief. In that connection I think it is worth saying that I am finding my work in the House of Lords and other national commitments are making many demands on my time and that I am especially grateful to my immediate colleagues for supporting me in this work and carrying a heavier load in the diocese as a result. Some of my activity in the House of Lords is shown on my pages on the diocesan website, though a good deal of it, as you can imagine, lies under the radar.

In the Preface to my little book I paid tribute to members of Bishop's Core Staff who give themselves so fully to the work of the kingdom of God in Coventry and Warwickshire they may like to know that I have a copies of the book to give to them today as a small token of my gratitude.

Christopher Cocksworth  
Bishop of Coventry