

## **2016 12 November Diocesan Synod: Presidential Address**

Micah 6.8: act justly, love mercy, walk humbly.

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness

Thank you to Sarum Academy for hosting us and to the students from St Edmunds' for leading our worship combining renewing hope with justice, mercy and humility. They spoke very movingly about the way in which justice means everyone's voice has to be heard, that mercy and kindness go hand in hand and that we each should be humble in the way we relate to one another. We can all learn from this but it is particularly important in our political life at the moment.

### **Synod's Agenda**

#### **Whom do you serve?**

There's a lot on Synod's agenda today that is about the sort of society as a Church we want and renewing hope. Whom do we serve? We are meeting in Sarum Academy because of the importance of our Diocese's work with 42,000 children and young people in Church schools and academies. This afternoon's business includes the annual report of the Diocesan Board of Education and an opportunity to think and talk together about why the Church is so heavily invested in the education of young people and how we can best support it.

#### **What do you pray for?**

When we last met in June I announced that Bishop Michael Perham has agreed to lead the Pray Forum for us for 3 years. A group has met under his chairmanship and are developing some creative ways to help support the prayer life of the diocese. No renewal happens without prayer. Br Sam SSF is going to present what they have been doing and encourage us to participate. Bishop Michael was in any case unable to be with us today but you may have heard he has a malignant brain tumour. He says that at present he scarcely feels ill but he is having to revise his commitments. He hopes to continue leading The Pray Forum into the Spring and hand it on in the Spring, around Easter. He asks for our prayers and as praying for the sick is one of the ways in which many of us find our prayer life renewed there may be a blessing to be found here in responding to his request.

#### **Cathedral, Church buildings and Church planting**

There is also much hope to be found in our cathedral and church buildings. The cathedral's annual report is coming first because the Dean is unable to be here later in the day but it sets the scene for the ways in which our church buildings encourage stability and our taking the long view of things under God. In a changing landscape we are also seeking to respond to new opportunities especially when a good deal of

new housing is being built in the diocese. Thought has been given to how best we can minister in these settings. Today we have a proposal for a Church Planting policy.

### **Comings**

Synod will want to welcome Debbie Orris, a Church Army Sister who is our new Discipleship Coordinator. The focus on discipleship is very much a national movement and Debbie will be a key resource s to support the local church in growing disciples in the way of Jesus Christ.

### **Goings**

Phil has been the Diocesan Accountant in July 2009. He is responsible for the all the finance functions of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), including ensuring that the annual accounts of the Board of Finance are prepared in accordance with statutory requirements. Members will know from the presentation of these accounts each June just how complicated these are.

More than that Phil has provided real support to Parish Treasurers and others on financial matters and has done this with sympathy, tact and firmness where needed. He has the ability to give clear advice on a vast range of complex matters – from gift aid to share to VAT to PCC annual reports.

Phil will be leaving at the end of January to pursue other interests having had a few weeks hand over to his successor Liz Ashmead who joins us in December. He has offered some of his time to continue to support the introduction of the Parish Giving Scheme next year because he is passionate about anything that looks to make the work of our financial volunteers simpler.

We are all very grateful for what he has done for the Diocese in the last seven years and wish him well for the future. If anyone wishes to contribute to a leaving gift for Phil please send cheques to Lucinda Herklots at the Diocesan office made out to Salisbury DBF with Phil Musselwhite written on the back so she knows what it is for.

Thank you Phil.

### **Bishop John Kirkham**

We have some wonderful retired clergy in this diocese including bishops. On 4 November +John Cavell was 100. Meanwhile the relatively youthful Bishop John Kirkham will have been consecrated bishop 40 years ago on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1976. He served as Bishop of Sherborne for 25 years to 2001. Bishop John was surprised that anyone else might want to mark the occasion with him but has agreed to preside at a simple celebration of the Eucharist in the Trinity Chapel of the Cathedral on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November at 6.30pm. All would be very welcome, especially if you let my office know that you will be coming so that we have some idea of numbers.

## What sort of society do we want?

In a week when the public discourse of politics has been unbelievably strained because of the American election, and after 8 years of austerity which has dramatically changed the tone and content of our politics, I want to say a few things that Christians might want to contribute to our common life from the wisdom of God that would help guide us in all our consultations.

1. I said at our last Synod, just before the Referendum on the day the MP Jo Cox was murdered, that I am very worried about the coarsening of language and tone in public debate. The American election has made this worse. The use of social media seems to allow people to say things they would never have said face to face but actually what was said face to face was pretty terrible.

When Jesus said “Love your enemies” and “Do good to those who hate you” he was not speaking theoretically or in the abstract. He meant what he said. In public and private we should speak charitably to and about one another. ++Justin has spoken a lot about the need for good disagreement among Christians. Churches have lots of experience of strongly held disagreement whilst knowing our deeper unity in Christ. Perhaps this is something we can help with in the wider world? Offensive language needs to be challenged or we will be complicit in allowing an offensive culture to develop.

2. God is the God of truth. Sometimes it is difficult to know the truth but we Christians are people who are about the truth. It is not acceptable for politicians to say we have entered an age of ‘post-truth politics’ as if truth no longer matters. I find it breath-taking to hear that what was said in a political campaign was not really meant, as if words are cheap and mean nothing as long as they pull the crowds along and get the right result. As was said in another context, “Careless talk costs lives”. As it says in John’s Gospel, if we know the truth the truth will set us free. (John 8.32)
3. The Referendum, as the US Presidential election, has made us more aware of serious divisions in our society. A report was published this week that a quarter of the children in this country, 3.5 million children, are growing up in poverty<sup>1</sup>. The number is increasing and it should be particularly worrying that the majority of parents of these children are in work.

In terms of deprivation indices the Diocese of Salisbury is one of the least deprived in the country, parishes like this one of Bemerton Heath know

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<sup>1</sup> End Child Poverty, Child poverty map of the UK, November 2016.

concentrated poverty first hand. What we do have experience of is inequality: the most expensive housing outside London in Sandbanks is a short distance from the most deprived parish in the Diocese, Kinson and West Howe.

In September the Poole Hospital hosted a day's seminar on inequality. Kate Pickett, one of the authors of *The Spirit Level*<sup>2</sup>, gave a compelling presentation showing that societies where inequality of income is least are not only the happiest but the healthiest and most prosperous. High levels of inequality are problematic. The average FTSE 100 company pays their highest paid 232 times more than the lowest paid. I have yet to meet anyone who thinks this is right.

It raises questions about the sort of society we want particularly when one of the factors behind Brexit and President elect Trump is said to be the anger felt by a large number of low paid working people that they don't have much of a stake in society nor much opportunity. Compared to when I was growing up social mobility is greatly reduced. What sort of society do we want?

4. Brexit means Brexit but the outcome of the Referendum is still anything but clear. In the Statement made this week about the process for invoking Article 50 it was said we would proceed in the best way possible for the UK's national interest, best for jobs, growth and investment. But what about best for cohesion and the common good, for society in a way that will heal division?
5. In the USA and across Europe there is a reaction against globalisation and a rise in nationalism. Historically this ought to worry us but nationalism of itself can be a good thing. I love my country because in this context I learn to love in the particular. To love England, or the United Kingdom, does not mean I cannot love the rest of Europe or other countries in the world. Charity begins at home but it does not stop at home, and so on. Even though we have voted to leave the EU we are still European.

In this context our international Church links gain greater significance. I welcome to Synod on your behalf Latvian guests from the parish of St Saviours Riga visiting Sherborne Abbey this weekend. They will give a greeting to Synod before we begin our formal business.

The churches played a creditable part in discussing and praying about the referendum Perhaps we should be planning some follow-on discussions and prayer in the new year?

### **And finally**

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<sup>2</sup> Kate Pickett and Richard Wilson, *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*, 2011.

Last week I was on duty in the House of Lords and said the Prayers there for the first time. In the context of a statement about the process for invoking Article 50 and the election of a new President of the USA, one of the prayers said there at the start of each day for hundreds of years seemed very significant.

Almighty God, by whom alone Kings reign, and Princes decree justice; and from whom alone cometh all counsel, wisdom, and understanding; we thine unworthy servants, here gathered together in thy Name, do most humbly beseech thee to send down thy Heavenly Wisdom from above, to direct and guide us in all our consultations; and grant that, we having thy fear always before our eyes, and laying aside all private interests, prejudices, and partial affections, the result of all our counsels may be to the glory of thy blessed Name, the maintenance of true Religion and Justice, the safety, honour, and happiness of the Queen, the publick wealth, peace and tranquillity of the Realm, and the uniting and knitting together of the hearts of all persons and estates within the same, in true Christian Love and Charity one towards another, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*