

# DIOCESE OF PETERBOROUGH

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### SYNOD CALLS FOR GREATER SUPPORT FOR ARMED FORCES

*Speakers stressed their pastoral concern does not imply endorsement of particular conflicts.*

**The Peterborough Diocesan Synod has called on church members to lobby government, MPs and local authorities for greater practical support for armed forces personnel.**

The call came during a debate at the Synod on Saturday (5 April), held at All Saints Primary School in Northampton.

Speakers expressed concern at the reported lack of equipment for front line personnel and especially the apparently inadequate provision of long-term specialist medical and mental care for people who have been injured or traumatised in recent conflicts.

However, those proposing the call strongly emphasised that it was issued out of a pastoral concern and should not be interpreted as an endorsement of any particular armed conflict.

Several speakers voiced doubts over the legality of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but still supported the call for greater assistance to be given to the personnel involved who have no choice but to obey orders.

The Synod motion was carried with only one abstention. It requested full moral and logistical support for personnel on active service; appropriate and adequate medical and financial support for the injured, traumatised and bereaved; and public recognition of troops returning home. The full wording is appended.

#### **Selected comments from the debate**

**Canon William Burke, Rector of Castor**, who seconded the synod motion, revealed that his Goddaughter had been killed in the recent conflict and his son had served there. He criticised the government for its recent attempt to stop coroners from commenting on the apparent lack of equipment or support which if provided may have helped prevent troop deaths.

He likened the need for support for injured troops and their families to the unquestioned pastoral support offered to people in prison. "They deserve pastoral care, even if we disapprove of what they have done," he said.

**The Dean of Peterborough, the Very Revd Charles Taylor**, was prevented by other commitments from attending the Synod but had circulated to members a paper supporting the motion.

Dean Taylor has a nephew serving in the army who has been deployed in Afghanistan. "Like many of us," he wrote, "troops also are not entirely sure what they are doing in Iraq, although most are more positive about their role in Afghanistan. It is clear that many feel largely unsupported, if not let down, by the great British public."

Above all, he claimed, those who are often badly injured, “need better long-term care.” Such care should not fall on the shoulders of charities alone “and it’s high time this nation woke up and demanded proper care for service men and women and also for civilians caught up in our current conflicts.”

**The Revd Stephen Trott, Rector of Pitsford and member of General Synod**, spoke of his experience in the army 30 years ago when injured troops could expect to be given good long-term care.

“But the government, it seems for economic reasons, has closed down specialist military hospitals. Those who serve and take risks on our behalf do not choose their conflicts”, he added, “and we need to honour them.”

**The vicar of Werrington in Peterborough, the Revd George Rogers, who is also Padre to the Royal British Legion**, was one of those who stressed that the motion was not about debating the rightness of current conflict but of supporting human beings who have been sent to the front lines.

He said that he was deeply disturbed by the vilification of returning troops, something he had also seen in North America during the Vietnam War. He wondered what kind of society we had become when political anger about a particular conflict effectively removed human concern for injured or needy people.

**Canon Grant Brockhouse, Vicar of Higham Ferrers** (near Kettering), was one of those who distinguished clearly between implying political support for conflicts and offering pastoral support to all forces personnel. “Whether we believe what they are doing is wrong, through this motion we are supporting them as people,” he said. “We may hate the sin of war, but we are none the less called to love and care for those who are damaged by it.”

**The Vicar of Christ Church Northampton, the Revd David Wiseman**, supported the call but expressed several reservations about the limitations of it. “The primary call of Christ is for his people to be peacemakers,” he said.

He added that “Our concern for ‘catholicity’ calls us also to have a concern for the places where conflicts occur, and that we should listen to the experience of those people who return from conflicts.”

**Alan Chantler, a lay member from Brixworth Deanery**, suggested that whatever our views on particular wars, “troops’ loyalty to their command demands our loyalty to them.”

### **Informal support already begun**

Synod was also told that the Priest in charge of St Andrews in Kettering, the Revd Nick Wills, who was not present at the Synod, has begun working informally with other churches and civic groups to offer practical and pastoral support to current and former services personnel who are experiencing a variety of personal needs. The Archdeacon of Oakham, the Ven David Painter, commended the initiative as one others could emulate.

### **The Synodical motion**

The was proposed by Mrs Penelope Escombe from the Corby Deanery and seconded by Canon William Burke from Castor (Peterborough Deanery). It read:

“This synod, in the light of personnel and pastoral experience in the Diocese of Peterborough,

- 1 Assures members of Her Majesty’s Forces currently on active service and their families of our support and prayers, and
- 2 Encourages Parochial Church Councils and leaders of other church communities in the Diocese to lobby Her Majesty’s Government, Members of Parliament and Local Authorities requesting
  - (i) Full moral and logistical support for personnel on active service
  - (ii) Appropriate and adequate medical, mental and financial support for those wounded, traumatised or bereaved, and
  - (iii) Due public recognition for troops returning home.”

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**FURTHER INFORMATION:** During Monday please contact Mrs Liz Hurst (Diocesan Communications Officer) in the first instance on 01733 887012 as Derek Williams will be largely unavailable. From Tuesday onwards, try either or both of Derek Williams’ numbers.