



# SYNOD NEWS

Peterborough Diocesan Synod

7 March 2009

## My prayer for the diocese

*An edited version of Bishop Ian's presidential address to Synod*

**If I was only allowed one prayer for the diocese, indeed for the whole Church, it would be that people would no longer find church 'boring' and would positively want to be there on a Sunday.**

Not because it has been jazzed up to rival the rather trivial entertainment provided by our media, but because, as Timothy Radcliffe argues in The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book *Why Go to Church?*, in the celebration of the Eucharist "God the Holy Trinity, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, touch[es] the core of our humanity and frees us to be sent in God's name, to announce healing and joy to all creation".

Radcliffe comments on a Jesuit's statement that "liturgy should take us by the hair and hurl us into the mystery of God'. I agree," he says, "but usually we are left firmly on the ground."

Now I am not against modernising the liturgy, or using good contemporary music and modern translations of the Bible! Indeed over the years I have encouraged those with the appropriate skills to do just that. But whatever medium we use – contemporary or traditional, liturgical or non-liturgical – must help us to engage with the reality of God, with "the drama at the core of our humanity" in Radcliffe's phrase, and

with the challenge to confront the world with the healing and the joy which God offers in Christ.

We should want to be there not because of the form of the worship, but because of its heart – because it, however fleetingly, engages us with the God who wants to make a difference in his world, and wants us to make a difference in his name.

Closely linked with that prayer is the concern that we should demonstrate what it means to be God's renewed community, and deal with our differences within the family, not by excluding each other by narrow definition or unfounded intolerance.

The Archbishop reminded us at Lambeth that in the New Testament there is no such thing as a single Christian. Jesus' disciples were sent out in pairs; Paul travelled with others and addressed his letters to the church; converts joined the local Christian community automatically.

In the Anglican Commun-

ion the model of "Bishop in Synod" speaks of a bishop in counsel with his fellow bishops and with the people of his diocese, both ordained and non-ordained (rather confusingly called "the laity" because we all belong to the laos, the People of God).

Timothy Radcliffe writing about the Creed reminds us of the evil of intolerance:

"The persons of the Trinity are not three 'imaginary friends', in the words of [Richard] Dawkins, three people with whom I can have fantasy conversations. Rather friendship with the Triune God reshapes my perception of the world. Believing in the Father, the creator of heaven and earth, I see everything with gratitude. Believing in the Son, I delight in its intelligibility and seek understanding. Believing in the Holy Spirit, I am thrown beyond myself in love. The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, should not make me a bigot, intolerant of those whose faith is different or non-existent. It



*Bishop Ian at the Synod meeting at All Saints School, N'ton*

should fill me with gratitude for their existence, open my mind to them and help me to see them lovingly. . . [It] challenges us to rid our loves and friendships of all that is dominating, patronizing, selfish or exploitative. Intolerant forms of Christianity have lost the plot, literally."

The model of "a bishop in Synod" requires a graciousness of speech and a willingness to attend to each other which I find sadly lacking in some the debates of both General and Diocesan Synods. Of course we will speak with passion, but passion that

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- Transforming "they to "we"
- School questions

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### **NEXT SYNOD MEETING**

**Saturday 10 October 2009**

Diocese of Peterborough,  
The Palace, Peterborough,  
PE1 1YA. 01733 887000.

# Synod goes bananas to transform the world

Every Synod member was given a Fairtrade banana courtesy of the Co-op, to eat before midday as part of a national Fairtrade campaign that weekend. The free gift provided a focus for a debate on this year's Diocesan Strategy theme of "transforming the world".

Revd Robert Hill (Social Responsibility Adviser) said that the Fairtrade movement shows that people overseas can be transformed by what we do. What began in a church is now on supermarket shelves.

"Transformation" runs through the whole Bible, he said. Status, understanding and relationships are to be transformed; God is transforming the world to become his kingdom. The Church has played a big part in transforming society already – schools, hospitals and charities pioneered in Victorian times were largely the work of the churches, and many are still staffed and supported by Christians.

The General Synod publication *Moral but no compass* raises questions of how the church is seen by national institutions, he added. "Is it right that a Christian child cannot wear a cross but a Sikh can wear a turban? We need to challenge and transform the attitude that sees faith life as separate from normal life."

People of other faiths have said they wished Christians were more open and knowledgeable about their faith, he said. But we can be seen as paternalistic rather than respectful of other communities, he warned; "transforming the world" may mean transformation of ourselves.



Canon David Bird, Archdeacon Christine and Bishop Frank eating their Fairtrade bananas at the Synod meeting.

The recent *Good Childhood Enquiry* shows that social divisions are still growing. We are called to share Christ's love with our neighbours – even those we dislike or disapprove of. The world can be so individualistic that it becomes selfish.

**Mrs Rona Orme (Diocesan Children's Missioner)** reminded Synod that 2009 has been set aside by the churches as a Year of the Child (marking the 30th anniversary of the UN Year of the Child). The need, she said, became apparent in the facts:

- 1 in 10 children aged 5-16 have clinically significant mental health problems;
- 60,000 are in the care of Local Authorities, and over 60% of them have been abused;
- 60 children are murdered every year, half of them by a parent.

We need to promote positive parenting, engage with others, and listen to children, she said. A digest of *The good childhood enquiry* is available from her (rona.orme@peterborough-diocese.org.uk; 01604 887045).

**Revd David Everett (Rutland)** said his church has helped build a medical centre in Bungoma. The link broadens our horizons, he said. To laughter he added that "to my surprise I married a Kenyan woman – not what I was expecting. If you get involved in transforming the world there will be some surprises!"

**Mr Selwyn Charles Jones (Brackley):** felt that *Moral but no compass* "is sad, defeatist and limp". Some Christians, he said, are so self deprecating that the world is confused as to what we stand for; we betray the God we believe in.

**Revd David Wiseman (Greater Northampton)** also regretted that it seemed to be bleating for a place in public life and letting government off the hook. He said 28% of people involved in community groups are church members (5% of the population). Worship should celebrate what Christians are doing in the community. We cannot hold services and ignore what is taking place in society.

**Canon Margaret Johnson (Greater Northampton)** suggested we have lost the

vision of how the gospel transforms us. We should have values that extend beyond issues of employment, mortgages, and education. We need to rediscover the heart of gospel so we can be transformers of a world that has lost its dignity and hope.

**Revd Jane Butler (Greater Northampton and Chaplain for deaf people)** described how the deaf church needed a new worship place and went to Kingsthorpe. At first hearing people thought they were doing them a favour. But the move transformed the deaf church and gave them a voice and confidence, and also transformed the hearing church. "Sometimes when you think you are transforming things for those perceived as less well off, they transform you instead".

**Ms Andrea McAuliffe (Greater Northampton)** had worked in Bellinge for 22 years. Many there don't understand that we are not born as Christians as Muslims are born Muslim. "I don't thrust my faith on people but they come to me for advice to see how my faith would cope with situations."

**Tony Smith (Higham)** reported how a church youth worker realised many young people were dealing with autism, and sought advice. "There is more to making church accessible than putting in disabled toilets." The East Northants faith group started at the instigation of the local authority. It has made the church visible to a wider audience and local government.

**Ann Slater (Daventry)** described how a housebound Christian lady

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of 88 had been in respite care. After half an hour someone said to her 'you go to church' – even though she hadn't said anything. One person can make a difference as their faith shines out.

**Bishop Frank** stressed the importance of not separating sacred and secular. Small things often flourish into greater ones in the long term. Local Councils are keen we should be involved but often their requests go unanswered.

**The following motion was carried unanimously:**

"In this year of transforming the world, this Synod: In affirming the place in public life of a *diocese inspired by God's Passion for the world*, asks the Social and Public Affairs Committee to encourage parishes and specialist ministry teams to:

- Study recent reports including *Moral but No Compass* (The von Heigel Institute) and *The Good Childhood Enquiry* (The Children's Society) and
- Take account of the recent General Synod debate *The voice of the church in public life*, in order to enrich the understanding and action of the people of the diocese in their commitment to the transformation of the world."

## Other business

The Synod dealt with a number of other shorter matters including:

- a report from General Synod;
- the pastoral order creating a new deanery of Rutland and the transfer of parishes from Barnack Deanery to Rutland and other deaneries; and
- the receipt of the annual reports from bodies responsible to the Synod.

# Transforming "they" to "we"

**The Synod broke into groups to discuss how to develop participation in diocesan life and mission through the work of the Synod and its boards and committees.**

Canon David Bird (Chair of the house of clergy and General Synod member) introduced the topic, having previously circulated a background paper. See also the current issue of DON.

We need to understand what it means to belong to a diocese, he said. Most of us relate to the local parish, but we are part of something bigger. No church in the diocese is isolated with no reference to others.

Nor is there an "us and them". Church members

are the diocese; it does not exist as an entity in itself but is the sum of all the parishes. It does not have a life apart from ourselves. We will be more effective if we commit ourselves to openness and trust, listening and forgiving, supporting the bishop and his staff in the work they do in leading us.

We are not in a democracy, but it is about participation and ownership. We need as



many people as possible to stand for diocesan synods and its boards so that we can be creative in delivering mission and ministry to the world, he added.

## Prayers for the world

**Canon Margaret Johnson focused the opening prayers on the Millennium goals and illustrated them with production of palm crosses in Zululand (workers pictured below). This project is administered in the UK from Emmanuel Weston Favell, where Margaret is team rector. It raises £29,000 annually for the African church.**

Synod remembered in prayer the 100m children who are not in school each day; the 500,000 women who die from complications in childbirth every year; and the victims of poverty, hunger and aids.

Midday Prayer led by Bishop Frank focused on the Feast of Perpetua, Felicity and their Companions, a reminder of the call to sacrifice ourselves for the needs of others.



## School questions

Written questions about the proposal to change the status of Unity College Church of England VA school into a Church of England academy had been received, and were given written answers.

Two supplementary questions were given and answered by Archdeacon Christine, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education. These can be read on the Diocesan web site: [www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk](http://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk)

## My prayer for the diocese - Bishop Ian's address continued from page 1

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spills over into attitudes that are "dominating, patronizing, selfish, exploitative or intolerant" have literally lost the plot.

I welcomed the recent decision of Gordon Brown to suspend Prime Minister's Question time because of the death of the Camerons' son was an all too rare example of seeing a political opponent as a fellow human being, and treating him with a consequential respect and understanding.

If only that deeply human respect could characterise more of our political exchanges and the way arguments are conducted on the media, then perhaps our children would grow up with a greater sense of politeness and mutual understanding. The Church should lead the way in building a gracious community, but so often we sadly fall short and reflect rather than challenge the norms of the society in which we live.

The other part of my Lenten reading is Bishop Tom Wright's book on *Justification*. His central concern is that we should understand Paul in his context of a first century Jew and not of ours, or of

the 16th Century Reformers. Paul was not trying to answer the individualistic question, "How can I be saved?", but the burden of Jewish concern: "Is God's plan of saving/transforming the world through his chosen people still on track?"

Tom Wright has done us a service by reminding us that our relationship with God is part of a wider and fuller picture. The focus of the Bible and the task of Christian theology is the exposition of God's concern and intention for the world. To individualise it is to distort the vision and rob it of its all-embracing power.

### Sharing in humanity

Of course the transformation of individuals is part of that vision, but its focus is on individuals in the context of their sharing in humanity and the whole created order.

To exploit each other, to exploit other races or the resources of the natural world are all equally contrary to his vision. I was delighted that the Prime Minister in his address to the US Congress said that "wealth must serve more than the wealthy".

I am also delighted that we are discussing the final leg of the strategy this year: "building communities which are transforming the world", as I have always believed that our faith should make a difference. My faith is world-affirming (including the affirmation of my humanity) not world denying.

The strategy is a single integrated statement and we will only make a difference in transforming

the world if we are inspired by God's passion and not ours, both in the sense of his passion for justice and peace and the nature of society, and also in the sense of the model of the suffering Christ in and through whom God's transforming power was disclosed.

That passion should be communicated to us through transforming worship, through communities which are shaped by mission – outward looking and engaged with our society and with the global issues which deeply affect our lives – and which value and release the gifts of others without the sense of competitiveness which frustrates the ability of so many organisations, including the church, to work effectively.

You cannot be a team if you are competing with one another. Rather we must embody the love which our understanding of God the Holy Trinity should inspire in us, and which demonstrates to the world what community living is all about.

Because of our reluctance to allow this vision to shape us we need the repeated invitation of the Eucharist to step into Jesus' world and his act of self-giving and allow ourselves to discover who we are and who we might become – to explore what it means to be human.

If we take such a step, "the look of the country changes: strangers are less threatening, it becomes possible to live more with our own failure and humiliation, and we may even be able to have

a faint idea of what it means to claim that human life is created for joyful sharing in God's life. And more – we become ambassadors for this new world, seeking wherever we are to let men and women know that violence and death do not have the last word where humanity is concerned" (Archbishop Rowan, in *Why go to Church?*).

If I have succeeded in embodying some of that vision in the life of the diocese, I shall retire with the sense that I have faithfully discharged the honour and responsibility of being your bishop for more than 12 years. Though I have always taken Augustine's words to heart:

*"For you I am a bishop, but with you I am a Christian. The first is an office accepted, the second a grace received; one is a danger, the other safety. If then I am gladder by far to be redeemed with you than I am to be placed over you, I shall, as the Lord commanded, be more completely your servant."*

The Church should lead the way in building a gracious community, but often we sadly fall short and reflect rather than challenge the norms of society.