

Bishop asks “Let’s walk together with Jesus”

In his address to Diocesan Synod in March 2014 Bishop Donald tackled several contentious issues. He began by explaining what he had done so far in the House of Lords since his introduction to it two months previously.

He reported that he had spoken in favour of restorative justice, by which offenders can meet victims and which helps to reduce re-offending. He had also asked a question about the persecution of Christians in North Korea where Christianity is illegal and an estimated 70-80,000 Christians are in internment camps. He spoke of the Topik project in our partner diocese of Seoul in South Korea to help break down barriers between the two countries. “I raised it to bring it to the attention of parliament and the media,” he said. “I will try to take opportunities to say things I think are important.”

He explained that the primary task of bishops “is to lead the church”, equipping Christians to be active disciples every day of the week. “We need to be well equipped disciples if we’re all to speak into public debate.” Bishops take the opportunities given them in the House of Lords “because we’re there”.

Turning to the debate on women bishops which followed his address, he said that he hoped that the subject would be off the agenda soon. “I believe we have a workable godly compromise and the proposals will help us all to thrive within the church,” he said. “I say to conservative evangelicals and traditional Catholics that I have no wish for you to disappear from the church, and I hope that your churches will grow and your witness will be part of our total witness.”

Turning to the same sex marriage debate Bishop Donald said that the rules had changed very quickly despite the fact that same sex marriage had not been included in the manifesto of any political party at the last election. He explained that parliament now has two different definitions of marriage on the statute book “which confuses the issue”.

“The church is saying that we need to discuss it and we must hold things together while we discuss it,” he explained. Two years’ of facilitated discussions are proposed which will begin later in 2014 or possibly 2015.

“While we discuss may we please respect and love one another and walk together with Jesus,” he asked. “What are the acceptable boundaries for the church and discipleship? Any changes must be careful, prayerful and thoughtful. We need to ensure that we disagree well. I pray that it will be possible to hold everyone together. That doesn’t mean compromise or being afraid to say what we believe, but to disagree well.”