

RICKMANSWORTH DEANERY SYNOD: *'We are the body of Christ'*

SYNOD OFFICERS

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Minutes of the meeting in Christ Church Chorleywood at 8pm on Monday 6th October 2008

The synod was a joint meeting with members of Watford Deanery to hear a presentation by a diocesan team, led by the Rt Revd Richard Inwood, Bishop of Bedford, on *Vision for Giving*, an aspect of the *Vision for Action* programme. On arrival, each person was given a Resource Pack containing an 'Obstacles Sheet' for completion before the start; this was an opportunity for those present to list what they considered to be obstacles to good stewardship.

In all about 70 people were present and the following Rickmansworth Deanery Synod members had sent apologies for absence in advance of the meeting: Rus Downham, Michael Hart, Sue Hillier, David Nobbs, Norman Pearce, Brian Smith, Alan Wills.

Welcome

Gavin Collins opened the meeting and welcomed everyone before handing over to Bishop Richard.

Presentation

The bishop's presentation was in effect an address contained within a formal service, which began with prayers and the hymn *Take my life and let it be*, during which the Obstacles Sheets were received by the bishop. After a reading from Matthew 28:16-20 and more prayers, the bishop spoke, using Power-point, about *Vision for Giving*.

He emphasised that we need vision for the Church, for the kingdom of God, and for the world, but vision without action is merely a dream. Giving is an essential part of Christian discipleship, as much as prayer, worship, service, etc. Stewardship is, after all, God's gifts to us, not just what we 'give'. Also, it means total giving, not just what we give through the Church.

Vision is essential to church life and essential to giving. People need something to 'buy into'. If they are to give generously and joyfully, there needs to be a vision which is:

- Shared - the result of a corporate act of listening to God;
- Clear - a few words that communicate well and powerfully;
- Particular - rooted in the gifts of the Church and needs of the local community;
- Inspiring - something that grabs minds and hearts.

He used 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 as the basis for dealing with the following questions:

Why should we give?

Because we live in God's grace, which includes the gift of Jesus Christ.

How should we give?

Generously; freely and cheerfully; proportionately; by budgeting.

Where do we go from here?

- To put our own house in order (Am I right before God about my giving?)
- To address the issue of giving in our churches (through regular teaching, annual recommitment, etc)
- To make use of the resources available.

We need to 'get real' about our giving, about the church's giving, about our income, about our spending, about the needs of the world, and about God's goodness.

Geoff Fletcher, the Diocesan Stewardship Development Officer, introduced the Resource Pack material.

Healthy giving grows out of a healthy church, one that is energised by faith, has an outward-looking focus, seeks to find out what God wants, faces the cost of change and growth, operates as a community, makes room for all, does a few things but does them well. He recommended the *Healthy Churches' Handbook* by Robert Warren.

In all of this, the aim is to seek to develop a Vision for Mission that is both inspiring and healthy. It needs:

- Depth (strongly rooted in a life of prayer and thoughtful theology);
- Breadth (proclaiming the Good News, safeguarding creation, transforming society);
- Width (in our theology, message, motivation, ministry and concern).

Geoff briefly outlined the main elements of the Resource Pack:

The local church - he recommended a short book *The Money Revolution: Applying Christian Principles to Handling Your Money*, by John Preston, the National Stewardship Officer of the Church of England (2007), designed to help local churches to link their vision for God's work with resourcing that work with gifts of time and money;

Marks of a 'healthy' giving parish - grounding a 'way of life' on mission (www.parishresources.org.uk);

Christian giving - from survival, through support of the church and submission to God, to sacrifice;

Resources for preaching - ideas at www.parishresources.org.uk and www.givingingrace.org;

Prayer resources - refer to *First Fruits*, a worship anthology compiled by A Mann (2001) Canterbury Press;

Exploring Christian Giving - study material within *Growing Together in Christ's Mission*, St Albans Diocese.

Giving in grace - recommended material from Liverpool Diocese on-line (www.givingingrace.org);

Resources for children and youth - available at the same Liverpool website;

How much to give? - the General Synod report *First to the Lord* (1999) gives guidance on proportionality;

Organising the offering - ideas for arrangements and prayers may be found at www.parishresources.org;

Parish Share - make clear to all church members what happens to amounts paid to dioceses.

Gavin then chaired an open forum, with Bishop Richard, Geoff and himself fielding questions from the floor.

After a time for reflection and further prayers, including one of commitment, the evening ended with the hymn *For the fruits of his creation* and a blessing at 9.30pm.

[Secretary's Note: *On 27th September, the Revd Peter Stearn, vicar of King's Langley for 26 years until May 2008, suffered a fatal heart attack near his home in Rickmansworth. An all-night vigil was held on 9th October at All Saints followed, the next day, by a private cremation and a Service of Thanksgiving. Peter was so loved by the whole community of Kings Langley that more attended this service than could fit into the church.]*

Next synod (7.30pm for 8.00pm)

Thursday 12th February in Chipperfield. Speaker: The Revd John Kiddle, Diocesan Mission Development Officer.

Distribution: *All synod members, The Ven Jonathan Smith, Jim May, Canon Robin Brown, Nick Alexander (Diocesan PC link), Philip Lovegrove (General Synod link), Margaret Millar (Methodist link),*