

DIOCESAN SYNOD ADDRESS

Saturday 15th October 2011

A. INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago today I spent the day in the Assembly Hall of Church House, Westminster with around 300 others celebrating the 25th Anniversary of CMEAC, the Committee on Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns. It was a terrific day, celebrating the achievements of these 25 years, and recognising how much continues to need to be done in relation to these concerns.

It was Sonia Barron's final event in her national role. There was personally something special for me celebrating the Eucharist at the close of the day with Sonia beside me serving as Deacon. A scenario reflected last Saturday in Dundee with Nigel Peyton celebrating his first Eucharist as Bishop of Brechin with Margaret Gallagher, curate at St John's, Carrington, serving as Deacon beside him. It was good to be with Nigel as he became bishop. Do keep him in your prayers as he begins this new role.

B. CMEAC QUESTIONS

The CMEAC Anniversary raised some questions for me which I want to share at the outset today.

1. A Question of Leadership

- a) I found myself challenged afresh about how we as a Diocese, at every level, are encouraging people from ethnic minority communities into leadership in our church. This is not simply about people whose ethnic origins lie in the Caribbean, Africa or the Indian sub-continent. It is also about people whose ethnic identity has roots in China, the Middle East, South America and in Europe. Remembering always that many whose roots may lie there are now 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th or even further back generations born in the UK.

The ethnic diversity of our congregations, PCCs, Deanery and Diocesan leadership is not truly reflective of the population of the Diocese as a whole. What I wonder might we be able to do, by way of positive intention, to nurture more leadership from within ethnic minority communities, not simply for church life but for that of the community as a whole?

How might our schools, our engagement with community, and community organisations etc., help develop leadership from within these communities that will enrich the life of the whole community?

- b) Here, in terms of our agenda together today, is some of the importance of having a clear Vocations Strategy. Vocations are about God's calling to all people to serve him. We need to see people grasp their life's work as a calling from God, not just a job to be done or a means of earning money. We need to re-capture the sense of being
- called to teach,
 - called to lead schools as a head;
 - called to create wealth and work as an entrepreneur or business leader;
 - called to produce food for the world as a farmer or agricultural worker;
 - called to heal and care for the sick and dying as a doctor, nurse, care assistant or para-medic;
 - called to serve the community as a councillor, council-worker, MP;
 - called to lead the people of God in their life of serving God in the world as a priest, deacon, bishop or reader;

- called to the great privilege of being a parent, grandparent or foster carer.

It is amazing how God calls us all – to join in his transforming mission – and calls us in so many varied ways.

Knowing we are called gives us an entirely different view on work, on our home life, and on our role as community members.

2. A Question of Young People

At the CMEAC event we had a session looking to the future. This was essentially a panel of young people posing some stiff questions to myself, Bishop David Walker and Revd Rosalind Murphy.

There were questions about worship being ‘boring’ and often failing to engage with their own culture, in particular ‘black youth’ culture.

There were questions about encouraging young people to engage more fully in local church life, and to help them grow into leadership.

There were questions too about wanting to ensure the continued Christian distinctiveness of church schools – and engaging with all schools, not just church ones.

These young people were articulate, clear, thoughtful and challenging.

Part of my response was that some of the questions related to all young people, not just those from ethnic minorities.

I want to be clear with you all here. If I could have my own way I would want to see at least two young people on every PCC – at least where there are young people in the church. I say two because they would be able to support one another in the role. I would also ensure that at least, initially, someone from the PCC acted as a mentor to help them get into the role.

Now if you think your PCC is not a suitable place for young people to be, I would suggest that means the nature of the PCC and how it operates needs some serious examination. A well run, collaborative style PCC, who see their main task as leading the parish in God's mission is a highly suitable place for young people to participate.

I would also encourage finding ways of getting the voices of younger children heard in parochial leadership. There are now some excellent ways that have been developed to help this happen. I know both Angela Brymer-Heywood and Nick

Harding would be only too pleased to help clergy and PCCs make both happen and work effectively.

At a Diocesan level I will continue to explore the most appropriate ways to get the views of young people into the Bishop's Council and this Synod. One step that is to be taken is the holding of our own 'Regeneration Summit' next February. This will be modelled on the national summit held earlier this year and will be organised and led by the young people who attended it with me.

In relation to younger voices still, it was a joy to share with around 25 children, and some staff and parents from 5 schools yesterday in Westminster Abbey. The amazement and wonder on some of their faces as they sat in this amazing building for the first time in their lives was a great reminder of the wonder of childhood. The whole service was a great celebration of 200 years of the National Society. Simply spending time with children at special events like this and in classrooms and school lunches is one way we listen to these younger voices. I am delighted too in the development of some Good Childhood Conversations in some of our schools and hope that we might learn from these in hearing children's voices in our own church life.

This is all part of how we express children and young people being part of the church now. In a similar way the issue of some children assisting at communion on occasions does as well.

3. A Question of Valuing the Elderly

The third question was not really raised on the day and has only percolated within me since stirred further by a workshop at this week's Diocesan Conference and finally brewed through Brian Draper's Thought for the Day this morning. It is the question of valuing the elderly in our society.

The early years of CMEAC and the battles that took place to get the C of E to take these matters seriously were highlighted by Ivor Smith Cameron, now very elderly. What struck me on the day, and has percolated away since is the honour given to these early battlers, and the honour being given to them for their continuing wisdom in their latter years. When I lived in Forest Gate one of the sights in Plashet Park on a summer's day was seeing a group of elderly Sikh men sat around on the ground together. They were sharing stories but they were also sharing wisdom. There was in the community recognition that the wisdom of the years is valuable.

Now the reports this week from the Quality Care Commission have been deeply disturbing; the elderly in hospital are often it seems not being treated with any dignity or respect. What this report did not highlight is the failure of neighbourly care to the elderly living alone in all of our communities. The failure to provide adequate support from within families and communities alike.

The years from 60 or 65 through to 75 and even well beyond are rich years for most. People remain fit and active; we need as a church to encourage such fitness and activity, encouraging all to contribute fully to our life and finding fresh ways of engaging with the spiritual needs of this generation. But as people pass 80 there come points where deep care and support is needed, for some it doesn't come until in their 90s; when this phase does arrive then care, respect, dignity all matter and cannot be subject to short cuts. It is our responsibility to speak up for, and lead the way in showing care, to the elderly, healthy and sick, and in particular to show care for those most vulnerable to the impact of ill health, the weather, social and financial changes. It is our responsibility to value the wisdom of the aged. It is also our responsibility to help older people grow in faith, even come to faith for the first time.

During the Diocesan Conference this past week Ann Morisey led a very helpful workshop thinking through the total issues around the massive demographic changes we are going through which leads us to be a much more elderly society.

C. DIOCESAN CONFERENCE QUESTIONS

From the CMEAC questions of leadership, young people and the percolated 1 of the elderly I turn to the lessons from this week's Diocesan Conference. Our theme was 'Enlarging the Tent: Growing Deeper, Higher, Wider and Longer.'

We were wonderfully served in the organisation of the Conference by Nigel Rooms, Catriona and Eleanor in particular. In terms of input we were enriched by Bishop Stephen Croft reflecting with us on biblical images of growth and exploring what an Anglican, and a CofE, theology of growth might be. He was clear and practical in exploring how growth in spiritual depth and in numbers might take place.

We were also deeply enriched by Ann Morisy, especially as she encouraged us to explore how we might live with an economy of abundance

rather than scarcity; how we might cascade grace and how and why the local matters.

Additionally Simon Oliver, our Canon Theologian, gave us helpful reflections on 'enlarging the tent' and our visitors from Palestine, the land of the Holy One, lifted our eyes to be concerned for God's people across the world.

The whole three days helped us fill out further how we take forward Joining Together in the Transforming Mission of God through Living Worship, Growing Disciples and Seeking Justice. It demonstrated well the interweaving of the three threads together.

My own closing sermon with reflections on the conference is available on the website.

What I want to highlight and repeat here is that our vision is one of growth.

- growth in our own love for our Lord;
- growth in our understanding of His ways and work in the world
- and therefore growth in our engagement with our communities, towns, city and county.

We want to seek justice for all people who live in our Diocese.

We are committed to seeing the church grow – in depth of spiritual life, certainly – and in numbers. We are about wanting to see new people enter into a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The parable of the sower reminds us this will not happen everywhere, with everyone. The story of the early church, and indeed of church history, tells us the same story. But we do believe that as the word of life is sown and watered so God will give the growth.

Let us as a Synod continually offer a clear lead to the Diocese as a whole in praying for, planning for in our financing and strategic thinking, working for God's glory and then watch to see what, where and when God causes it to grow.