

**Worcester Diocesan Synod
Presidential Address**

June 2010

We have a packed agenda this evening and it ends, it might be argued, where it ought to begin – with the scriptures. However, I can soon put that right by mentioning them now.

We have a wonderful opportunity to encourage engagement with the scriptures with the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible next year. That translation has had a profound effect up on the culture and language of this nation and I hope that it will be celebrated and affirmed for that reason but I hope that, for us, this anniversary will be a hook upon which to hang an encouragement to increased encounter with the scriptures.

The Bible in its entirety has been read out loud here in Stourbridge as well as in Bromsgrove in the recent past and I hope that we shall be able to come up with all sorts of similarly imaginative initiatives which will encourage people on the edges of the faith as well as paid up Christians to read the scriptures and be changed. The scriptures are indeed life changing: I was reminded of this when I invited the author Fay Weldon to speak at Ely Cathedral. She had been a strong atheist but had accepted an invitation to write a foreword to one of the books of the Bible in a series which you may remember. The experience of writing on 1 Corinthians - what might be seen as an unlikely choice for a feminist atheist – converted her to the Faith.

We don't have to wait until next year to engage with the Bible, of course, and I was encouraged by what a positive response there was to the Bible studies which I and the two archdeacons gave at the launch of the *Giving for Life* project.

The launch of that project was Mel Smith's parting gift to the Diocese and I want to pay tribute here to all that he has given in so many ways to the furtherance of God's mission here. I do hope that the Diocese will fully embrace *Giving for Life* – that would be a suitable parting gift for us to give to him. In those Bible studies we tried to articulate something of how crucial money is to discipleship, pointing out, for example, that Jesus knew how interesting and vital it is to people. Our Lord made more reference to money and possessions than to either prayer or faith – more than his sayings about heaven and hell combined. That's why our consideration of accounts and budget this evening is not some sort of tedious extra which we have to put up with, it is core to God's mission.

The majority of our expenditure in the Diocese is on clergy, and rightly so. They are at the front line of God's mission, consecrating their lives to it in a very particular fashion. That's why it is good that we are spending time this evening looking at the manner in which we care for our clergy, particularly with the advent of Common Tenure. I am grateful to Canon Stuart Currie, as Chair of the House of Clergy, for chairing a small group which is looking at pastoral care of the clergy in the Diocese.

And it is good, too, to be reminded that we are part of a worldwide church. I was privileged to lead a Diocesan Pilgrimage to the Holy Land last month and it was a wonderful thing to see the profound effect that being in there and experiencing the scriptures come alive had on the fifty-eight of us who went. I have found that travelling to the Holy Land works wonders for the renewal of people's faith and there's a part of me that thinks that we should set up funds to enable everyone to go there at least once in their lifetime. If I had to choose somewhere else to take people in order to see their faith renewed it would be Africa. I am delighted about the progress that is being made with the proposed link with the Diocese of Morogoro and feel that we have a great deal to gain from it. WE shall have an opportunity to approve that link and learn more about it this evening.

Finally, I want to let you know that the 2020 Vision Group which you agreed I should set up when you last met has had its first meeting and it was a very encouraging one. As one member of the group put it to me in an e-mail after the meeting "I thought yesterday afternoon's first 2020 Group meeting was great! I am excited about the work that lies ahead. There was huge energy and enthusiasm and it felt like a very safe place in which we can grapple with some big issues with honesty and humility." We hope to consult widely in the Diocese as part of that work in the autumn but in the meantime I want to let you know the names of those who, following consultation, I invited to be members of that group along with Bishop David and myself:

Roger Morris
Robert Higham
Alastair Findlay
Georgina Byrne
Sarah Brush
Joshua Coles (Youth Council Member)
Katharine Green
Rob Hall
Fiona Haworth
Keith James
Rich Johnson
Judith Oliver
Sam Setchell
Rob Sprake (Secretary of Group)
Andrew Spurr
Chris Stuart
Robin Sykes

It's a youthful group and I'm not sure whether it feels good or worrying to be one of the elder statesmen of it - but I hope that it will help us to discern what God's will for the future for us might be. Please hold its members in your prayers.

+John

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