

Birmingham Diocesan Synod Address for the Eucharist 14th November 2009

‘The Spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth’ Phil 2:1-11; John 16:13-15

Are you here to look inwards or outwards? - At the start of a new triennium,

What is the Spirit saying to us?

‘God is Back’ says one contemporary book title. If so then we are reminded of his sovereign power and kingdom rule, the Other revealed in Jesus whom we follow and call ‘the Lord’. God who is worthy of all praise, worship and service. God, who ‘so loved the *world*,’ involved directly in his Creation. God who commands his disciples to make disciples and who ‘adds daily to their number those who are being saved’. This is a God of converts rather than consumers building a church of people more interested in others than themselves ‘taking the form of a slave’. Being recognised as distinctive, Birmingham Christians who look outwards to God and neighbour.

As Synod members we will of course have some responsibility for the inward working of the church, and in the new triennium this will have the emphasis of Governance for Change.

This is at it were ‘taking responsibility for responsibility’: in ensuring there are sufficient resources for our part of God’s mission, especially in the light of the Church Commissioners’ triennial allocations, 2011-2013; by welcoming and acting upon the Stewardship presentation today; even noting Dr. Ord’s new ‘Giving What We Can’ campaign; by being wise in debate and decisions about Women in the Episcopate and the proposed Anglican Covenant; and by owning and promoting the ecumenical strengths of a broad, national church.

To assist in this we will be transforming our diocesan structures of governance and delivery and need Spirit-guided minds and words in our Councils.

Most of all we are asking God to help us Grow the Church. Our main programme, Transforming Church, has been launched successfully and consultants are criss-crossing the diocese, making many encouraging discoveries with the aim of reporting to a Steering Group led by the Bishop of Aston and the Archdeacons in the summer of 2010. In this we will be paying particular attention to the Ten Diocesan Goals. The hard work begins not so much with those parishes that are flourishing but with those areas of struggle where radical mission solutions must be found and resourced with prayer, people and pounds. We will be testing the strong flow of vocations to ordained and other licensed ministry and maintaining the highest standards of training and nurture. There will be a new emphasis on making confident disciples everywhere, from the outer estates, to immigrant areas, business districts and the leafy suburbs.

We will continue to base this movement on prayer in 2010 with further prayer leaflets and city centre events at Pentecost in May and in November with Redeeming Our

Communities. We will also accompany the Roman Catholics in what may be a special year for them. In 2011 we will take the opportunity of the 400th anniversary of the publication of a bible in English to focus on Holy Scripture and in 2012 the Olympics will no doubt give us a further strong Community theme.

As a diocese dominated by the greatest city outside London, we will continually ask the Spirit to show us what part we must play in building the Good City. Here we have specialists in education, the economy, regeneration, health, politics, faiths, ethnic minorities, leisure, politics and communications.

We will welcome a new Dean to our Cathedral and have a Lent lecture and study series on Discipleship.

In 2010 there will be a General Election before and during which the churches will be expected to engage in vigorous debate.

Will the Faiths for the City coalition grow? How will the Agreed RE Syllabus for Birmingham fare under national pressure?

One big internal and external challenge is in the area of knowledge management. How do we make the most of all our talents and activities both in churches, communities and the whole city?

None of our aspirations and commitments make sense without a global perspective. We will continue to strengthen our link with Malawi. During the next year Synod will be asked to endorse a Diocesan Environmental Policy currently under construction. Perhaps you would like to read 'Why we disagree about climate change (Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity)' by scientist and Anglican priest Mike Hulme (CUP 2009) as we prepare for next month's Copenhagen summit.

You can enjoy our contribution to Inter-faith week from Monday in the Cathedral with the Ark story.

By the time of the US Presidential Elections in 2012, the London Olympics will be over. Will we still be at war in Afghanistan? What will be our role and burden, whether in manufacturing or services in the global economy?

Which returns us to God and the scriptures: the Spirit 'will bring glory' to Jesus. Let us inherit the promise that the same Spirit will tell us 'what is yet to come', 'that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'.