

# **Transforming Church Presidential Address Birmingham Diocesan Synod March 2008**

## **The Journey So Far**

In July this Synod will receive the Annual Accounts and Reports of the Birmingham Diocese. They record a remarkable achievement of faithful people in the service of Jesus Christ. There you will find described the raising and spending of some ten million pounds.

At the heart of all the activity this represents you would expect parish life to be pre-eminent: the support of some 180 stipends and on-costs; training courses and events; mainstream programmes (e.g. youth, children, interfaith, minority ethnic Anglicans, regeneration, evangelism, communication, overseas links); pioneer initiatives; schools and education; chaplaincies of all kinds.

The Diocesan support for parish life (Church House, Registry, Chancellor, Statutory Bodies, Cathedral) is designed to work hard and travel light. This includes Bishop's Croft! We are well served by highly energetic and professional staff.

In recent years, a strategic approach to the allocation of resources in Jesus' service, 'Called to a New Kingdom' has meant a refocusing of clergy posts and a reshaping of some parishes. The Centenary celebrations of 2005 were also stimulating and reflected to some extent the 'six discernable calls'.

After a period of consolidation we are now preparing for an even greater challenge, 'Transforming Church', for growth and development. As background we have had the questions 'What is Church?' 'What is Church in Birmingham?'

For those whose expectations have not yet been fulfilled I mention Habakkuk 2:3 'though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay'. I have looked, listened, prayed, hinted and am now declaring!

## **Getting Ready- Platform 9 and three quarters**

With the expected arrival of (a yet unknown) Bishop of Aston in September we can do more in the Bishop's staff to help develop policy proposals. Nonetheless, more important than central direction is the willingness of local Christians in their parishes to participate in what God is doing. This will mean transformation of our deeply held patterns of familiar service, which may involve a higher level of risk than we are used to. We might well want to seek outside help.

Before we look too quickly at our own area of interest or responsibility we must keep our heads up so as to see together as clearly and as far as we possibly can.

## **On the Way**

Three perspectives are important if we are to understand what is being asked of us by way of participation.

*God's Mission.* You will have often heard me quote 'it is the God of Mission who has a Church, rather than the Church of God that has a Mission'. We see in Jesus' pattern

‘The Son can do nothing by himself: he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does’ John 5:19

So we need to spend time in the next five years ensuring we are conformed to and transformed by God’s agenda.

*Kingdom of God.* Our statutory role as Diocesan Synod is necessarily limited to the Church of England in Birmingham and Region. Nonetheless Jesus is described as going ‘throughout Galilee...preaching the good news of the Kingdom, and healing...’ Matthew 5:23 We need to be aware of God’s territory and rule, beyond the C of E and be prepared for the Holy Spirit’s transforming effects on our lifestyle and priorities.

*Church of God.* We have a major responsibility as disciples in the Church of England to enable the local Church to flourish. Jesus said ‘I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it’ Matthew 16:18. Are we making space in our Councils and planning groups to ensure that our parish, community life and working lives are engaged with the Mission of God and are signs of His Kingdom?

### **Mapping: leadership; authority; power; inspiration**

As we get underway, suggestions about the effectiveness of Forums, Deaneries and other existing parts of our institutional life and ideas for better ways of delivering our response to God’s Mission will emerge very quickly. Participation and Delivery rather than Meetings and Control will characterise flourishing contemporary Church.

In the next few weeks Bishop’s Council and the Area Deans will both have residential gatherings to explore the longer-term vision and strategy for our part of God’s Mission and Kingdom. I wonder whether a Lay Conference in 2009 would also be an opportunity for encouragement in this direction.

The Bishop’s Core Group, which also meets regularly with the Directors and Advisers, will have a transformed agenda raising our sights from management to policy development.

The Bishop of Birmingham will oversee three streams of policy development for God’s Mission: Mission Resources (money and deployment\*); Mission Learning (training and disciple making) and Mission Operations (parish development, programmes and pioneer projects). Key questions such as ‘What size does God want us to be?’ ‘What are the outcomes of our training courses?’ ‘How can the Church grow?’ will help us make transforming proposals for action.

\*particularly the 140:40 challenge and the vital role of Stewardship; Communications and Vocations.

### **Vision**

I believe that everyone in Birmingham and Region, some one and a half million people, should have the opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ and make their minds up about him. This ambition will mean a mighty movement of prayer and action in collaboration with all Christians. (See Stephen Spencer ‘Christian Mission’ SCM).

During Lent I have seen many expressions of this during visits I have made to places including the Hope Hut, Lickey Hills; Young Disciples, Lozells; Children's Hospital, City Centre; St Saviour's School, Alum Rock; Lunch Club for the Elderly , Tile Cross; Christian Solicitors, Anthony Collins; Midweek candle-lit gathering, Kings Norton; Mum's and Toddlers, and Mosque, Springfield; Aluminium Factory, Garrett's Green; Community and MP, Chelmsley Wood; Prayer labyrinth, Harborne; Holy Communion, Solihull.

Now, the parishes across the Diocese must play their full part in a myriad of expressions of the Good News.

'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom. And we all...beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his likeness...'  
2Corinthians 3:18

+David Urquhart

15<sup>th</sup> March 2008

Birmingham