

Christmas 2016 Newsletter

Dear Friends

One of the great emphases of John's gospel is that Jesus came as the Saviour, with the whole world in view. As many people pour into our churches this Christmas, it is a delight to remember that our gospel message is for the whole world. One of the enduring strengths of the Church of England is its reach into, and interest in, every community. We are in the middle of a period where we are rightly very concerned over the extent to which the world's thinking has invaded our own teaching and practice - but this period of the year is also a time for making the most of the opportunities we have. I am certainly praying that many will be drawn closer to the Kingdom of God as a result of our ministry.

In this newsletter I will:

- ❖ Give up to date news on which churches have passed resolutions under the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests;
- ❖ Highlight some new developments in my ministry that could have implications for Anglican evangelicals more widely;
- ❖ Look forward to some new initiatives for 2017;
- ❖ Itemise matters for prayer - including prayer about current developments on sexuality.

Resolutions passed

In the last six months, we are aware of 41 more PCCs that have passed resolutions, bringing the total number of churches which have passed resolutions on evangelical theological grounds to 71. Many more are discussing the possibility with their congregations and PCCs. If you know of any churches which have passed resolutions which do not appear on the list below, please contact Rachel Lickiss on admin@bishopofmaidstone.org or 01342 834140 to let us know. So far as we can tell, my office is the only place where central statistics on evangelical 'resolution' parishes are collected.

**Information on resolutions passed, as of
19 Dec 2016**

Diocese	Parish	Diocese	Parish
Birmingham	St Agnes Moseley	Guildford	St Andrew's Frimley Green & Mytchett
	St Stephen's Selly Park	Lichfield	St Luke's Wolverhampton
Blackburn	St Bartholomews, Ewood		Castle Church Stafford
	Christ the Saviour		Oswestry Holy Trinity
Canterbury	St James Westgate	London	St Thomas', Oakwood
	Christ Church Ramsgate		St Luke's Hampstead
	All Saints, Loose		St Anne's Limehouse
Carlisle	St James, Burton in Kendal		St Paul's Hadley Wood
	Houghton and Kingmoor		St Helen's Bishopsgate
	St John's, London Road, Carlisle		St Peter's Barge, Limehouse
Chelmsford	Becontree St George		St Botolph's The City
	Chadwell St Mary	Manchester	St Peter's Chadderton
	St Peter's Harold Wood	Norwich	Christ Church Lowestoft
	Henham, Elsenham and Ugley	Oxford	St Ebbe's, Oxford
	Becontree St Elisabeth	Peterborough	St Peter and St Paul, Moulton
	Immanuel, Brentwood	Portsmouth	St James' Ryde
	Christ Church, Leyton	Rochester	St Nicholas, Sevenoaks
	St Paul's Harold Hill		St Johns, Tunbridge Wells
	Fordham		St Peter's Bexley Heath
	St Peter and St Paul Dagenham		St Peters, Tunbridge Wells
	St John's Great Clacton	Salisbury	St John's Wimborne

Chester	St John's Lindow	Sheffield	Christ Church, Fulwood
	St Mary's Cheadle		St Andrew's, Kendray
	St John's Church, Over		Gleadless Valley
	St John's Knutsford		
Chichester	Holy Trinity, Eastbourne	Southwark	St Nicholas Tooting
	Christ Church, Horam		Emmanuel, Wimbledon
	All Saints Crowborough		Holy Trinity, Wallington
Derby	St Peter's Stapenhill	Southwell	Dundonald
	St Mary's Chaddesden		Holy Redeemer, Streatham
	St Giles, Normanton		St Mary's, Wollaton Park
Ely	All Saints Little Shelford	St Albans	Holy Trinity, Frogmore
	Christ Church Cambridge	Winchester	St Mary's Basingstoke
	St Andrew the Great, Cambridge		Christ Church Westbourne
Exeter	St Matthew's, Elburton	Total	Sherbourne St John, Basingstoke
	St Leonard's Exeter		71

New Developments

As you will know from previous newsletters, I have been made an honorary assistant bishop in ten dioceses with an eleventh shortly to be announced. This has led to me being asked to provide continuing episcopal ministry for 31 churches so far. In addition a number of dioceses have indicated to me that, by virtue of my role in both northern and southern provinces, I have permission to minister in any church requesting me to do so. These include (alphabetically) Birmingham, Blackburn, Carlisle, Derby, Peterborough, Southwell and Nottingham, Truro and Winchester.

Some other dioceses are happy to give permission for individual church ministry on request.

In some cases, where I am an Assistant Bishop, Dioceses are asking me to help with general ministry (ie not related to parishes which have passed resolutions). This ranges from conducting confirmations to acting on behalf of a Diocesan Bishop in cases brought under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003.

Where I am given permission to offer pastoral and sacramental ministry on a continuing basis, it is not always clear how far such ministry extends. In some cases I operate on the basis of a written record of a discussion with a Diocesan Bishop. In others there is an agreement that I should feel free to operate quite generally whilst encouraging parish clergy to maintain good contact with the suffragan and diocesan bishops. In one recent case, explicit permission was given to me to help in the discernment process for new ordinands and to make recommendations for training. In addition the 'London Plan Working Arrangements' give me an extensive role of 'involvement' alongside Area Bishops. One of the issues that parishes face is how to help members of their congregations who may disagree with a PCC decision to pass a resolution. Simon Austin, the rector of St Leonard's Exeter and a member of my Advisory Group, has produced a helpful paper which he circulated to his congregations and is happy to see more widely used. You can access it by clicking on the relevant item in the 'Links' section of my website, which will be launched in the coming days.

New Initiatives for 2017

I am organising a half day seminar for incumbents, on Thursday 4th May at St Andrew's Church Oxford, on what steps can usefully be taken to help prepare prospective ordinands for the Bishop's Advisory Panels (BAPs). Two of the speakers will be Revd Phil Moon (Bishop Hannington Church, Hove and a BAP selector) and Revd Paul Williams (Christ Church, Fulwood, Sheffield). I will also aim to include the experience of a candidate who was at first turned down by a BAP but subsequently approved (a year later). The event runs from 11am to 3pm and if you would like one of the limited number of places, please contact Rachel Lickiss on admin@bishopofmaidstone.org or 01342 834140. There will be a small charge for lunch and other costs - but if that is a problem I am happy to offer 100% subsidies!

One of my continuing areas of concern is the extent to which we are helping 'laity' in their leadership roles - and challenging them to step into such roles. Some very useful work continues to be undertaken by Lee Gatiss in producing a weekly 5 minute exposition on the lectionary readings in video form. However, in a recent conversation with Tim Thornborough the suggestion was made that we could do more to encourage active and fit members of the 'Third Age' (which I think might include me) to train for bible teaching ministry and then be commissioned for ministry in churches that would otherwise be struggling (eg in some multi-parish rural benefices). This is something I intend to discuss with my Advisory Committee, but if you have any thoughts or suggestions which relate to this idea, I would love to hear from you.

I will also be discussing with the Advisory Committee whether there is a need for me to offer wider training resources across both Provinces. One thought that

occurs to me is that a day on expository preaching could be offered which Dioceses could use as part of the IME programmes.

Finally, I am contacted from time to time by those seeking to fill clergy vacancies or looking for curacies or first incumbencies. While there are several bodies that can provide help on a more comprehensive basis than me, I am happy to keep note of such requests and provide what help I can.

Prayer

I am very grateful to the large number who have been praying for me over my role in the House of Bishops' Reflection Group on Sexuality. I have been particularly asking for prayer that I will be granted the wisdom to know what to say and when to say it!

You will probably know that the work of this group fed into discussion which took place both at the House and the College of Bishops earlier this month and the plan now is to consult the General Synod in February as well as to update Synod as to where our discussions have reached.

Along with all other bishops I have agreed not to comment on the content of any of these meetings beyond articulating my own views. I am therefore unable to say anything about what the future might hold. However, so far as my own views are concerned please be assured that I continue to believe that God's Word is clear that sexual intimacy should be experienced only within heterosexual marriage and not otherwise. This means that I continue to hold to Lambeth 1:10, the Jerusalem Declaration and indeed the view of marriage last articulated by the Church of England in 2012 when it contributed to the Government Equalities Office Consultation on Equal Civil Marriage and stated "...the Church of England holds, as a matter of doctrine and derived from the teaching of Christ himself, that marriage in general - and not just the marriage of Christians - is, in its nature, a lifelong union of one man with one woman".

Please continue to be much in prayer for the February General Synod meeting with the important preparatory work beforehand.

I would also be very grateful if you would continue to pray for the development of my ministry in 2017 - that it would genuinely encourage and promote the gospel; that I would be able to foster interest among prospective ordinands; that I would be a help in enabling new congregations to thrive; and that I would be courageous and gracious in calling people to repentance and faith and in fulfilling my consecration vow to teach and refute error. At the moment my programme for the first 6 months of 2017 includes:

- ❖ 15 confirmation / baptisms
- ❖ 10 other preaching engagements
- ❖ 10 presentations to PCCs or other church meetings

- ❖ 5 contributions to courses, conferences or evangelistic events
- ❖ 3 licensings or ordinations
- ❖ 2 parish weekends or days away
- ❖ Many meetings including those of staff in diocese, the House and College of Bishops, and meetings of AMiE and Reform.

Please do continue to include me in your plans. I very much enjoy each parish visit I make - and the prospect of travel doesn't put me off at all!

Miscellaneous

I have been asked by Jane Moxon of CMJ to make people aware of a lunch with talks at City Temple, Holborn, London on 25th January for all clergy of any denomination to come and hear the Revd Dr David Shmidt speak on the relevance of the Balfour Declaration for today. If you would like further information about this event, please contact Jane at janemoxon@balfour100.org.

I am happy for my newsletter to be used to publicise in which you are involved on the basis that inclusion does not imply my personal recommendation. Please do get in touch if you would like me to mention anything that you are involved in organizing.

With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.
Rod Thomas