



Synod Feedback

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24 September 2017

Jonah 3:10 - 4:11

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 20:1-16

Judith

Last weekend Philip, Cushla and I attended the annual Diocesan Synod in Palmerston North, and we'd like to offer some feedback today on some of the key themes and decisions.

In his introduction to Synod on Saturday morning, Bishop Justin explained that there were two elements to the "core business" of Synod:

- the formal business of decision-making and debates
- the informal fellowship, sharing stories and making connections with one another from all over the diocese.

Each are just as important as the other, and the timetable and format of Synod for the weekend was shaped to achieve both.

The theme for this year's Synod was "Being Sent". Sometimes that might involve being called by God to do slightly crazy and risky things! At Synod both Bishop Justin and Bishop Ellie gave very thought-provoking addresses, and throughout Synod we were all mindful of the theme of "Being Sent".

Cushla

I have always had difficulty with the words of Bishop Justin's command to the churches in the Diocese to care for THE LAST THE LOST AND THE LEAST. I

couldn't get away from it sounding paternalistic. Who are we – who am I – to decide who are those people. And how do I decide anyway? Is it based on monetary values? It seemed to me like a hark back to a colonial mentality.

It was somewhat clarified for me by Ellie. This was her first Synod as Bishop Eleanor and she delivered her Charge. That is, her challenge to the Diocese. Her's was a personal story. She began by talking of symbols and images by which people of God navigate their journeys to give them orientation or direction. She gave examples from the Old Testament and then turned to the image of the Banquet Table in Revelation, which exemplified the coming together, the consummation of humanity and divinity. Banquet tables are a foretaste of what is to come.

However banquet tables can burden people with the woes of the world - I guess that is because all can see the extent of all that is wrong in the world. Alternatively they can increase the capacity of people to love. Over time that capacity to love increases infinitely.

Ellie then focussed on a time when she was at a crossroads professionally. In 2005, she was giving a paper at a Geography Conference in Chicago. Her research was on the influence of Jesus in community development specifically in Fiji and rural Tanzania. She was torn on the one hand by the expectations and norms of the scientific academic world (ie religion has no place in scientific research) and on the other hand her complicity as a white female academic from a 1st world country talking on behalf of 3rd world people.

This day she was led by God to go to church. At the door way sat a homeless man begging. She was called by God to invite him to lunch.

There followed an internal battle. God told her to go to church first then invite him to lunch. Ellie told herself not to walk past him to church. That would be rude and to invite him to lunch first. She went in to the church where the message was a call to embody the gifts of God. So she felt that gave her the permission she needed, to speak on behalf of the people of Tanzania and Fiji. She left the church. She invited Ronnie to have lunch at Wendy's Diner. He in fact stuffed the lunch in a bag to take away and eat later. But during the time they were together he said to her **"People do not know what true riches are. Anyone can be on the street"**.

She was aware that she and Ronnie had ministered to each other. That is, she had got as much or more from him as he had from her.

She was concerned that the people of her research in Tanzania and Fiji would not understand what she was saying, but they did not separate Christ from their everyday life. She said Belief is total not just Knowledge.

More recently she asked a group of NZ students - so called privileged - “**Do you love yourself**” and the response was increasingly “no” the older the children were. So, she asked how do they or we follow the direction to Love your neighbour as yourself? We must first accept the gifts of love and grace for ourselves. This was her charge.

I still have to remind myself that the Last the Lost and the Least includes everyone who is in need, though it be in different ways.

The full video of Bishop Eleanor’s address to Synod is on www.movementonline.org.nz

Philip

- Bishop Justin's charge to Synod picked up from the 11 minute Pre-synod Video we showed you a few weeks ago (on the subject of *How to Change*).
- Bishop Justin said he dreaded raising the issue of church growth. We aren't growing, we aren't reproducing.
- Leaders feel guilty. That's natural.
- But we need to have the conversation: "Do you really want to work towards growing?".
- If so things will need to change in your parish.
- Bishop Justin pointed out that growth is a natural thing for any organism or organisation: we are either growing or dying. If we are not growing as a person continually, we are slowly dying. If a business is not growing, it is dying.
- In the early church growing was the norm.
- The good news is that the percentage of parishes growing in the diocese is going up. Interestingly there is nothing demographically in common with these growing parishes.
- There is no cookie-cutter approach to growth. Growing parishes don't have the same theology or style of worship.
- If you want to change it will be costly and personal.
- Some conversations should have been had 10 years ago.

- If we want to grow we need the right leader - particularly relevant to St Alban's at the moment.
- Often parishes have a sense of "we have been doing this for 20 years and we have to keep it going"
- There are some "sacred cows": "you can do anything, but don't change X, Bishop".
- "To change that we wouldn't be Anglican".
- Actually Anglicanism is 500 years old and is all around the world and done differently in different places.
- So what we actually mean is: "that it isn't my kind of Anglicanism".
- This conversation is not a pleasant conversation: at a Bishop's conference 2 years ago, Bishop Justin mentioned that not once was our reality ever discussed.
- Bishop Justin challenged all the Synod representatives to go back and encourage their vestries to do whatever it takes to grow.
- We were challenged with the question: "Is this a challenge that we want to take back to our vestry?"
- If your vestry would rather live in dysfunction, then own it.

The full video of Bishop Justin's address to Synod is on www.movementonline.org.nz

Judith

***A Way Forward* report**

Synod spent some time discussing the report of the latest *A Way Forward* working group on the issue of recognising same gender relationships in the church. In recent years there has been much discussion on the issue and there is a diversity of views about same gender blessings and the ordination of people in same gender relationships. It's become clear that diverse views are the result of careful prayer and study, and are held with equal conviction before God. So the main issue now is how can those diverse integrities live together in one Church. The desire to stay together as one Church was the key outcome from the consideration of this issue by General Synod in 2016.

The latest report (*Interim Report of the Motion 29 Working Group*) proposes a structure which would hold our Church together in unity, while allowing the diverse positions to be held. The report proposed that there be no changes to

the church formularies – ie, no changes to the doctrine on marriage as being between a man and a woman. A diocesan bishop would be able to authorise individual clergy within their mission units to conduct services blessing same gender relationships, but there would be no obligation on clergy to do so.

The process of discussion at Synod was guided by video addresses by our Bishops, and will be available to parishes to use if they wish to have these discussions too, and give their feedback to the diocese. The diocese will then collate all the feedback and submit it in November to General Synod.

More details of the Synod discussion process and the journey so far on this issue are on www.movementonline.org.nz

Changes to the Synod and Mission Units Canon

Synod made some changes to the Canons that have the effect of strengthening the links between Vestries and Synod representatives.

- Mission units will be encouraged to give consideration to the election of a churchwarden as a lay Synod representative in the first instance, with other lay Synod representatives being people with a significant ministry role in the mission unit.
- Elected lay Synod representatives will become members of Vestry, so they have a full role in Vestry.
- Mission units with at least one FTE (full-time-equivalent) stipended ministry staff will be entitled to two lay Synod representatives; those with less than one FTE will be entitled to one; and those with two or more FTE will be entitled to three. It was acknowledged that using the FTE formula was not without its problems, but it was noted that there is no perfect formula, and that other alternatives seemed to pose more problems.
- Vestry members, like Synod representatives, will be elected for a term of two years.
- The six year consecutive year maximum that already applies to serving on Vestry now also extends to Synod representatives.

More information on the debate at Synod and the changes to the Canons is on www.movementonline.org.nz

Our Diocesan culture

Since Bishop Justin was elected five years ago there have been changes to both the culture and language we use in the diocese about our relationships with one another. The term “family” is one which Bishop Justin uses often – he spoke of Synod as the “family reunion” of the governing body of the diocese. Those who have been part of the Anglican church for some time are probably familiar with the structure of our diocese, and you may visualise a traditional “organisation chart” format with the Bishop at the top, then the Archdeacons underneath, and then separate parishes underneath that. However that top-down culture is no longer what we’re invited to engage in. Instead, we’re invited to visualise a much more organic network of local faith communities, all linked in a variety of ways - a web of connections, a family linked in lots of different ways. And all the local faith communities move together in accordance with the diocesan vision to transform our neighbourhoods.

What does this mean for us? It means that here in Eastbourne we are the diocese in this place. We hold and promote and share and communicate the diocesan vision in this neighbourhood. And whatever journeys we find ourselves in the midst of, we are part of the diocesan family. Everything we do as a parish, must be looked at through the filter of the diocesan vision, mission and values.

Our God is a generous God. In our readings today we heard about this generous God: God who spared the people of Ninevah; God who gave his Son to the world; and God who, like the owner of the vineyard, is so generous he bestows gifts lavishly on everyone, no matter how long they might have “worked in the vineyard”.

The Saturday afternoon worship at Synod took the form of a Eucharist as well as a healing service. Bishop Eleanor invited others at Synod to go with her out into the streets on Saturday lunchtime to give out invitations to the public to come along. Our worship together reminded me of our generous God, as everyone was welcomed to the Lord’s banquet table.

Whenever we come to worship we are nourished and fed by our generous God. And then God says: “Go, be my presence in the world – be sent”. That’s the challenge to all of us. Amen.