

17 October 2015

QUESTIONS - FIRST NOTICE PAPER

- 1 Mr Phillip Brown (Biggleswade Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Bedford: -

"Does the Bishop of Bedford agree that the low representation from the Bedford Archdeaconry on certain Diocesan boards or committees in the last triennium may reflect the fact that most of them meet in St Albans where timing and travel difficulties discourage volunteers, especially those in the north of Bedfordshire. To encourage more volunteers from the Bedford Archdeaconry could there be a review of meeting times and locations once the new committees are established so that each committee takes into account the travel requirements of its members?"

The Bishop of Bedford will respond: -

I thank Phil Brown for his question. I am aware that on some Boards and Committees there are relatively few representatives from the archdeaconry of Bedford. Equally, though, there are others where the archdeaconry is well represented and I thank those representatives, and all who have served during the last triennium for the time, commitment and expertise which they have brought to the work of the diocese through those bodies.

I am also aware that there are other constituencies which are under-represented on diocesan bodies and we need to ensure that membership of our Boards and Committees is representative of the people, parishes and communities which they serve. I would strongly encourage all members of Synod to consider carefully whether they will agree to be nominated in the elections now underway, or whether to nominate others, particularly those who have traditionally been under-represented on our elected bodies. You will all have received nomination forms; spare copies are available and the closing date is 12 noon on Friday 23rd October.

It is for each Board and Committee to determine the time and place of their meetings and it is likely that there will be a range of views about the most convenient arrangements if we are to accommodate those who are retired, those working or studying, those with family responsibilities or others who rely on public transport.

I note that currently, the timing of meetings across the Boards and Committees varies considerably ranging from a start time of 8.30am, to later morning, afternoon and evening meetings. I will certainly recommend that the different bodies should review their arrangements in order to take account of the differing needs and circumstances, including travel requirements, of their members."

2. The Revd Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Bedford: -

"The Church of England has recently established a talent pool (The Learning Community) for those clergy identified as having the potential to take on leadership roles in the future. What proportion of those admitted to The Learning Community are women?"

The Bishop of Bedford will respond: -

I am grateful to Dean Henley for his question. 23% of the Learning Community are women compared to the 24% of stipendiary clergy who are women."

3. The Revd Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Bedford: -

"Can the Bishop detail the names, and the constituencies they are deemed to represent, of the participants he has chosen to represent the St. Albans diocese at the Shared Conversations in Human Sexuality taking place early next year?"

The Bishop of Bedford will respond: -

The Lay and Clergy Chairs are working on this and the representatives will be proposed and chosen on the basis of the national guidelines."

4. Canon Peter Adams (Luton Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Bedford: -

"Most of us have seen dramatic reports of the numbers of refugees and migrants fleeing conflict and persecution in the Middle East and other parts of the world, either for temporary shelter in refugee camps or migrating to Europe and elsewhere in search of a safe and stable home for themselves and their families. How can our parishes and we as a diocese respond effectively to this great human need?"

The Bishop of Bedford will respond: -

As Christian people we respond with prayer, compassion and practical action. There are many churches and individuals who have already begun to respond in many different ways, which has been very encouraging.

I have written to Local authorities expressing concern and offering our support in any response. I have also written to local clergy to encourage local responses.

We welcome many local responses from around the diocese organised by clergy, deaneries and individuals. The Board for Church and Society is setting up a working group to co-ordinate our response. The main contacts for this are Chris Neilson, Church and Community Officer cco@stalbans.anglican.org 01727 818147, and Bonnie Evans-Hills, Inter-Faith Adviser bonnie.evans-hills@hotmail.co.uk. Please contact them with further questions, information or offers to help. In addition the Board has a Refugee and asylum group who would appreciate support.

As the situation is changing regularly further information will appear on the diocesan website. We would also like to use this space to tell others about local responses around the diocese.

Practically we can;

Pray for the safety and security of those on the move. We must also pray for the swift end of the trouble and hardship causing this crisis.

Give generously to charities who are directly involved with giving support to those in need. US (formerly USPG) is leading a rapid response in Europe with the Diocese of Europe <http://www.weareus.org.uk/news/europe/> and there are a number of other charities who deserve our support.

Encourage authorities, local and national to accept refugees coming to this country, support those on their way and care for many still in refugee camps. A local Amnesty campaign has been started and can be followed at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HertsWelcomesSyrianFamilies/>. Citizens UK have also started a campaign nationally which can be seen at, <http://www.citizensuk.org/>

Find secure homes for refugees coming to this country. The lack of housing is an issue limiting many organisations in accepting refugees. If you have a home which could be available for rental to a family, or know a landlord who may, you could contact your local authority or register it at http://www.citizensuk.org/help_find_homes_for_syrian_refugees

Welcome individuals and families in your community who may have fled conflict or persecution in their country and support them to thrive."