

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

11 MARCH 2017

QUESTIONS – SECOND NOTICE PAPER

- 3) The Reverend Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Reverend Karen Turner, Chair of the Diocesan Caribbean Links Group: -

“Over a succession of questions and answers to your predecessor, Fr. Darren Collins, Synod has gained the impression that the position of your committee as to the active homophobia of our Caribbean link dioceses (the Diocese of the Windward Islands, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and St Lucia, Guyana and Belize), is that if a few gay people are criminalized and go to prison in these countries; then this is sadly a small price to pay if it means we do not discomfit our relationships with these diocese and their bishops.

What is the theological rationale of your committee for this position?”

The Reverend Karen Turner will respond:

Firstly may I apologise for my absence at Diocesan Synod here today. Prior to my becoming the Chair of CLG I had already accepted an engagement for this date. I do regret not being present personally but trust that my following words answer the question asked. Any subsequent questions will be addressed by Bishop Richard on my behalf.

I do feel concerned as to the information used in your question. Being new to the Chair of CLG, receiving your question and having read past questions and their responses; nowhere can I find a statement that our Diocese or the CLG, is content for a few of our LGBT+ sisters and brothers to go to prison in order to keep our links alive.

What I do read is that we want to work in partnership with our link Diocese, to understand at a deeper level the challenges and pains of transforming our church and society, (both here in St Albans and in the Caribbean); into a place where all are welcomed and safe, valued for themselves as individuals, no matter the colour of skin their race or their sexuality.

Change is a slow process but whilst working in Belize I represented the Bishop at the IDAHOT, which was both moving and significant for all those attending. I don't feel that severing links is a useful answer because it would take away the voices that can and should be part of conversations that lead to change.”

- 4) The Reverend Dean Henley (Amphill and Shefford Deanery) to ask the Bishop of St Albans: -

“In a political context, the prevailing elite are often described as ‘pale, male and stale’. Although there have been welcome appointments to the posts of Dean of Women's Ministry, Archdeaconry Women's Advisers and as the

Archdeacon of Hertford; the five authors of the *Living God's Love 2017 Lent Course* are all middle aged white men. The course is framed around the *Living God's Love* themes of generosity and joy, imagination and courage and yet no women have been invited to give voice to these themes.

What steps will the Bishop take to ensure that women's voices will be heard in future?"

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

I am grateful to the Revd Dean Henley for raising this important issue. In responding to these concerns, I have tried to set his question in a broader context in today's Presidential Address, where I suggest that the issue is even wider than the specific instances that he cites. Over the past few years we have been working hard to ensure that there is a broad representation of male/female, black/white, abled/people with disabilities and young/old in our diocese. For example, we try to ensure there is a wide spectrum of people at the front at the Chrism Eucharist, at ordinations and the licensing of Readers etc. However, we have not solved this; we are still on the journey and there is much more that we need to do. This is the case with the 2017 Diocesan Lent Course, where we discussed the question of contributors at an early stage, but realised that whatever we did it would be difficult to assemble a group which would not be beyond criticism as not representing one or other group. However, I take the criticism on board and am happy to give an undertaking that we will look closely at this matter should we decide to produce another Lent Course."

- 5) The Reverend Chandrika Perera (Stevenage Deanery) to ask the Bishop of St Albans: -

"I would like to ask how equal opportunities in this diocese is being implemented and specifically the proposal, from the National Transformations Agenda, that 30% of all teams should consist of minority ethnic groups?"

I note that 4 white women have been appointed to the new team to support and encourage all ordained women in the diocese and whilst I have no objection on personal grounds for the appointment of these particular 4 white women, I wonder, if before 4 white women were appointed, questions were asked as to why Black and Asian women clergy had not put themselves forward for these roles?

On querying the appointments I was encouraged by a member of Diocesan Staff to be an advocate for better representation of BME but was saddened that this appeared to suggest it was my responsibility solely to do this and not a shared responsibility.

My sadness is that we have the choice to be counter cultural, to proclaim a different set of values about who's important and who's not and we choose not to do that".

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

In my Presidential Address I underlined my concern at the under-representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in our church. Not only does this fall short of the ideals of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who invites people of all nations and races to be part of the new redeemed humanity that he is forming, but it means that as a church we are missing out of the gifts, energy and distinctive insights that our BAME brothers and sisters bring to the table.

It is the responsibility of all of us to address this problem, not just Christians from the BAME community. This is where careful monitoring of appointments and racism training can be powerful tools to help us review progress and also to recognise our unconscious biases and do something about them.

At the same time, it is also the responsibility of all people in the diocese. Before the last elections for Diocesan and General Synod I raised the subject in public and urged all those who wished to propose and second candidates to bear in mind the need to have a good representation of people standing for election.

We will review the situation and see what more can be done to sensitise ourselves and all people in the diocese when consulting about appointments such as the membership of the Transformation Group and the Rural Deans.

On a matter of detail I was unaware of the point that Chandy makes about 'the proposal, from the National Transformations Agenda, that 30% of all teams should consist of minority ethnic groups?' and have been unable to find out where this was agreed. Having enquired of her, the Revd Jeanette Gosney, Dean of Womens' Ministry, commented 'the Transformations agenda talks of 30% of the minority gender on any group/team – to try to reflect better the 50-50 population balance', which is a slightly different point. Due to the very specific nature of this query, we may need to clarify it by correspondence rather than on the floor of synod."

6) The Archdeacon of St Albans to ask the Bishop of St Albans: -

"Given that there are EU Nationals living and working in the UK who are cherished members of congregations in this Diocese, together with British Nationals originally from this Diocese now living and working in the EU who are cherished members of congregations in the Diocese of Europe, will the Bishop give an undertaking that he will use his best endeavours through his membership of the Upper House of Parliament to ensure that the fears of such people, as to their right to remain living, working and worshipping in their current domicile, be allayed?

The Bishop of St Albans will respond:

During the past few weeks both the House of Commons and the House of Lords has debated this issue at great length. I have kept closely in touch with the debate throughout. I, along with other members of the House of Lords, have been engulfed with correspondence and emails, expressing the concerns of those EU nationals who are living here in the UK and British citizens living in other parts of the EU. This matter has turned out to be one of the most worrying aspects of the Brexit process for millions of people who are not living in their country of birth.

Politicians of all parties have disagreed as to the best way to resolve the problem. Last week the House of Lords passed an amendment, asking the government to give guarantees to all EU nationals who are living here in the UK. The government argued against the amendment on the basis that this might be seen to be abandoning British citizens living in other parts of the EU. The amendment now returns to the House of Commons and it is highly likely that it will be overturned. The reason for this is that the government believes that to give rights to one group without the promise of reciprocal rights to the other is unfair and is also not a good idea when one is embarking on a process of negotiations.

I believe the most important thing is to try to resolve this specific issue early on in the negotiation, thereby providing assurance to all those affected. However, that will depend upon all sides agreeing to make it a priority and that can only be achieved through mutual agreement. I have personally spoken to ministers about this issue and underlined my concerns that we need to expedite the matter as quickly as possible. I will continue to do all I can to help this difficult problem move to a speedy conclusion."