

THE BISHOP OF ST ALBANS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DIOCESAN SYNOD

MARCH 2017

ALL ONE IN CHRIST

'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. (Galatians 3.28)

As you can see from the agenda, a number of questions have been tabled at this Diocesan Synod which we will come to later this morning. Two in particular have prompted me to return to subjects which I have spoken about in previous Presidential Addresses. The questions by Dean Henley on the balance of male and female and by Chandy Perera on the ethnic balance in our church and ministry raise important issues for us. I am grateful that they have highlighted these matters for us again.

If the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, then we would hope that our congregations, our elected officers (such as churchwardens), our lay Readers, lay ministers and our clergy would reflect the population which lives in each parish. Where there are imbalances we need to ask questions about what is going on. For example, have we stopped being the church of Jesus Christ for *all* people and instead become a club of like-minded people?

So I want to spend a few minutes this morning reflecting on the challenges and opportunities this represents. I am going to focus on the two issues of gender and ethnicity, although I want to set the debate in a much wider context.

Firstly, gender. Last year I received a letter from one of the women chaplains in our diocese who reported a comment from a student in her school: 'Our chaplain seems like an intelligent person, why does she work for an organisation which treats women so badly?'

When I was asked about this I pointed out that we in the Church of England are nowhere near achieving equality between men and women, but if one uses the student's argument then no women would ever want to work in politics (especially if they aspire to be a Cabinet Minister), the judiciary or to be a FTSE 100 director. I have printed out below some statistics from a government report which spells out the size of the problem.

Female representation in a range of occupations in the UK:

		%
Members of Parliament	(2015)	29
The House of Lords	(2013)	23
The Cabinet	(2014)	14
Members of the Scottish Parliament	(2011)	35
Board of public bodies	(2012)	35
Senior civil service	(2013)	36
Justice of the Supreme Court	(2013)	8
GPs	(2012)	47
NHS Consultants	(2012)	32
Secondary school head teachers	(2009)	39
University Professors	(2011-12)	21
FTSE 100 directors	(2013)	17 ⁱ

What this table shows is that British culture has a significant problem to address: women are underrepresented in virtually all areas of work. However that does not let us off the hook. How are we in the Church of England and in particular in the Diocese of St Albans, going to respond to this? The challenge is sharp as there is already a gender imbalance among Church of England laity where women outnumber men.

Let me turn to the question of ordained ministers. We have bought some copies of the latest report from WATCH, which will be available at the back afterwards, which I hope you will take away and read. With regard to this diocese, we are making progress among those who are being ordained (priested):

Break down of male and females priested in the Diocese of St Albans

	Stipendiary female	Self-supporting female	Stipendiary male	Self-supporting male
2011	4	2	1	1
2012	2	2	6	1
2013	3	1	5	2
2014	8	0	8	2
2015	4	3	8	2
2016	3	2	6	1

The situation in the Diocese of St Albans in 2014 was that 37% of those ordained were women. (Source: Diocesan Transformations Group). In 2015 twenty nine percent of incumbents were women but this improved in 2016 and figures are still being processed. (Source: WATCH Report).

Number of men and women appointed to stipendiary posts in the Diocese of St Albans

	Female	Male
2011	4	15
2016	12	11

However, we have a long way to go, not least because of the age differentials of those entering training. As a recent report puts it:

If you are under 40 years old and going to a BAP, you are more likely to be male. If you are over 40, you are more likely to be femaleⁱⁱ

There is no simple or quick fix to solve this problem, which is why we have a Transformation Group in the diocese and why we have brought this subject to Diocesan Synod on a number of occasions. The only way we are going to change it is if we all, at every level of the church, work away at it. That includes the parishes, the chaplaincies and the schools, as well as our structures. We are continuing to review a range of factors which may explain why there are still gaps between male and female and see how we can respond to them to improve the situation.

Secondly, we move onto the question of ethnicity and in particular the role and involvement of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. Take a look at the statistics from the last census in 2011 about the population of our diocese (I apologise that with our limited resources, we were not able to find out the statistics for those parishes in our diocese which are in Barnet):

Ethnic breakdown of populations in the Diocese of St Albans

	Bedford Borough %	Central Bedfordshire %	Luton %	Hertfordshire %
White	80	85	55	88
Black/mixed	6	4	10	4

Indian sub continent and China	11	6	30	7
Other	2	1	2	1

The last national census found that 14% of the population of the UK were BAME. Yet, the *2014 Everyone Counts Diversity Survey*, conducted three years later found that BAME people (although this just counted those who were eighteen or over) was 6%. At least that was an improvement from the 2007 survey which had found only 4.7% of the congregations were BAME. That same survey found BAME involvement in roles in the Church of England were even lower. BAME people made up only

- 4% of PCC members
- 6% of deanery synod members
- 6% of churchwardens

Another survey of clergy conducted in 2012 found that 2.8% of the clergy were BAME.

The percentage of BAME candidates recommended for the ordained ministry in the Church of England

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Proportion of BAME candidates recommended for training	5.2%	4.1%	5.5%	3.8%

These depressing statistics feed through into the numbers of BAME in authorised ministry at every level of the church. Although we thank God for having a black Archbishop of York, there is only one other black bishop at the moment.

In my June 2015 Presidential Address I spoke about the need to encourage Black and Minority Ethnic people to stand for our diocesan synod. In fact there is a need in every area of our diocesan life to make a special and concerted effort to correct some of the dreadful things that we done to many BAME people when they arrived in the post war immigration starting with the arrival of *Empire Windrush* in 1948. Many of those who came, usually from parts of the Commonwealth, were life-long Anglicans and yet they were not

made welcome. Most of them landed up worshipping in independent churches.

Having highlighted the areas of gender and ethnicity, I should point out that there are other challenges which we need to reflect and act upon. For example, we know that as a church we still need to do more to welcome and embrace people with disabilities. This is how Roy McCloughry, the National Disability Adviser on the Archbishop's Council, put it:

‘One in five of the population is disabled yet many do not think of disabled people as having a ministerial vocation. That often includes disabled people themselves. They can be disabled by the attitudes, processes and assumptions which prevent them from coming forward. When it is acting instinctively rather than thoughtfully the Church can revert to ministerial stereotypes which are white, male and able-bodied. Consequently, the shape of ministry is determined by what such people can do, rather than exploring creatively what other kinds of ministry might be possible. Disabled people should not have to feel that they are compared to a tick list where several categories are weighted against them. Rather, the approach, which is gaining hold, is to ask, ‘what kind of calling do you have and how can we support you in that?’ If such an attitude takes hold in the Church then a burst of creativity and diversity is possible’.ⁱⁱⁱ

In some areas there is some wonderful work and ministry going on already. Many church buildings have been altered to offer equal access and hearing loops. Some churches have large print service books available. Having said that, I know that there are still many people with disabilities who do not even consider coming to our churches because they presume that they would not be able to find access or would not be truly welcomes.

Then there is the area of age. The average adult age in the UK is 48. The average age of Church of England churchgoers is 61.^{iv} (This hides wide variations, for example, the average age in a rural congregation is generally over 65, whereas in London the average churchgoer is aged 54).

Part of our response is the bid we are making to the Church Commissioners’ Growth Fund so that we can resource a project to develop more Fresh Expression of Church. It is significant (and encouraging) that the the Church Army Research Unit, a part of the research programme of the Church of England, recently examined 1,100 fresh expressions of church in the UK and found Fresh Expressions ‘attenders are much younger than the control group of parishes surveyed, with an average age of 25-34 against the average age of 65 for parish church attenders.’

Well, all I have been able to do is to skate over a large and complex subject and there are a number of other areas that I have not explored at all. Nevertheless I think this does highlight an important issue. I return to the question I asked at the beginning: If the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, then we would hope that our congregations, our elected officers (such as churchwardens), our lay Readers, lay ministers and our clergy would reflect the population which lives in each parish.

So the challenge I put to myself and to you is ‘How does the make-up of our congregation reflect the make-up of the population that we serve?’ That’s a really good question to ask and to answer the next time you review your *Mission Action Plan*. There is a need to monitor what is going on in our congregations and PCCs as well as at a diocesan level. And then there are the most important questions of all ‘What are we going to do so that we can be truly welcoming to all people?’

ⁱ The full report can be seen at:

<http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.parliament.uk%2Fbriefing-papers%2Fsn05170.pdf&ei=n0ARVYCLA4HtaMemgtAD&usg=AFQjCNFerv7jEl6oDkwZ0XdE2mm6ae4W1g&bvm=bv.89184060,d.d2s>

ⁱⁱ <https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Ordained-Vocations-Statistics.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/renewal-and-reform/why-the-church-is-promoting-the-vocations-of-disabled-people/1228469333896912>

^{iv} <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/7054097/Average-age-of-churchgoers-now-61-Church-of-England-report-finds.html>