

What sort of church?

I want to thank Peter for his excellent paper. It is passionate, well argued and very clear about the challenges before us.

I want to make 3 points

i. Unity and Diversity

At a time like the present when we are attempting to elect an Archbishop, it can often seem that there is a lot of diversity, but not much unity. Yet, it would be true to say that in the Eastern Region when we come together that isn't usually our experience. I know the other bishops would feel the same way. We're diverse, but we're also respectful. We are able to acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses. It can sometimes be uncomfortable but not always and not all the time. The limits of our diversity is one of our big challenges and I personally support Peter's suggestion of a 'vitalothodoxy.'

I personally am of the view that at this time in the life of the Anglican Church that the major challenge God is guiding us to wrestle with is to become a mission shaped church. The Archbishop of Canterbury has given a strong lead on this issue.

I recently preached on Acts 10 and 11 – the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. It is a dynamic story where God acts and speaks very directly. Cornelius has two dreams; Peter the apostle has the same dream three times. God is acting very clearly. The issue is that God the Holy Spirit is pushing and prodding Peter and then the church to take the gospel to the Gentile world. I believe we are at such a point today.

God wants us to look beyond ourselves and our issues to a needy world in need of the gospel. For evangelicals it means wrestling with why we often see numerical growth but low conversion growth. For Catholics it means

re-discovering the gospel message and the need to explain the faith and disciple people. It means many of the things Peter talks of

passionate worship
passionate evangelism
passionate social justice

I believe God is pushing and prodding for us to unite together in him around being missional and stretching us about what diversity is really about. To be missional will mean embracing and enabling a range of approaches that many will be uncomfortable with.

ii. On Going Parish Revitalisation

Peter gives us the grim statistics and they aren't encouraging. Yet, at the same time there is a lot of evidence across the Diocese of many churches that are going forward or are wrestling with going forward. In my Region alone there would be 25 – 30 parishes in this category. It may not always be showing up in significant numerical growth but the intention and the desire is there. In some cases there have been significant turn arounds. I don't believe we can expect every parish to be able to turn around, but many ought to and many are. The keys are picked up by Peter, but I would say they are:

- Deep dependence on God in prayer
- Clear leadership by clergy with the lay leadership in their context
- Bible teaching and small groups for discipleship
- Building Ministering Communities not Communities that have gathered around the minister
- Starting New Congregations to connect with new people in new ways
- Engaging with and serving your local community
- Offering regular opportunities for people to explore the Christian faith in a variety of ways

iii. **Culture Shift in the Diocese**

In order to go forward, we need to do a lot of work on clarifying a number of issues as a Diocese

- What is the Diocese there for?
- What is its relationship with the parishes/agencies?
- What are we trying to achieve together?

My vision is that of a central body that sees itself as a resource/service organisation

Offering advice

Delivering service

Enabling local ownership/initiative

Someone has said that 'we're Anglican's' not 'Anglican'ts'.

So often it is easier to say 'no'

'not yet'

'no way'

than to give permission for things to happen. Unfortunately this is very true of Diocesan decision making – controlling, confused, fearful, risk averse, disempowering

We need to encourage a 'can do' culture and this needs to become more evident at the centre.

To do that we need to allow the leaders to lead and to agree on how we make decisions together.

I'm an optimist and I'm convinced that we can go forward together, if we really want to!