

## **FORWARD IN FAITH**

### **NATIONAL ASSEMBLY 2019**

#### **ITEM 5: Reports from the Episcopal Regions 1: The See of Beverley**

**Fr Graham Hollowood and Fr Paul Kennedy  
(The Bishop of Beverley's Representatives in the Dioceses of Manchester and Durham)**

#### **The Bishop of Beverley**

Well over twelve months ago, I put in the diary a day – today – to spend with those in the Durham Diocese who are at various stages of the discernment process towards ordination – a group of thirty people. I am leading the day (from 10 until 4.30) on mutual flourishing within the Church of England – what it is about and what it is possible for it to be like. I hope that you will therefore accept my apologies and acknowledge the importance of what I will be trying to do on behalf of us all today.

#### **Fr Graham Hollowood**

I want to start with Manchester. Over twenty years ago two members of the General Synod had a conversation about lines of communication – about dialogue. That conversation led to the meeting of what we have called 'Joint Chapters'. At first it was a small group from the Forward in Faith Chapter and from the Women's Chapter. Throughout those difficult times over the years, we have kept meeting. Not only have we kept meeting: we have even had an annual prayer vigil together. Over the years, we have not only communicated: we have also attempted to understand each other. Some friendships have been made across the divide, which have helped to steer us through those difficult waters.

Following the decision to consecrate women to the episcopate, we have looked at ways not only to keep these lines of communication open, but also at how that should develop: how we could try to do things together. Between us we have held several events. One year after the consecration of Libby Lane and Philip North, we invited them to Manchester to tell us about their experience in their first year and how they had changed during that year. We have talked about mission, looking particularly at catholic mission. We have touched on that thorny problem of whether it is priesthood or 'leadership' that we are called to today: how do we interpret that in the light of catholic faith? We are planning that next year we are going to talk about the confessional.

It is essential that we keep the lines of communication open, that we work together with those with whom we disagree, as much as we can, without comprising our position or their position.

Following the 'settlement' (if I can call it that) and the publication of the Five Guiding Principles, the Bishop of Manchester formed what he called a Flourishing Group. Initially, it was eight people plus himself – a mixture of lay and ordained, traditional and affirming catholics. In recent times this group has been expanded with the addition of two conservative evangelicals. The main purpose of the group was to ensure that the Five Guiding Principles are adhered to in the Diocese and to look at how we might build Mutual Flourishing, and

what it might look like in the Diocese of Manchester. Many issues have been brought up and discussed over the last couple of years. People have been invited to come along.

Bishop Glyn and the Archdeacon of Rochdale, Cherry Vann, have had sessions with readers in training about the Five Guiding Principles. We hope that in future we can expand that to include the ordinands as well.

For us, it is important that these groups exist, and that we are able to build relationships with those who think differently from us. I also think that it is important that we should be as integrated as possible and be involved in as many committees and bodies within the diocese as possible. We need to raise our profile; we need to punch above our weight, if we are to survive. This is what we strive to do in Manchester. We should be there; we should be in the midst of the Diocese, and we should be saying 'Yes' as much as possible, supporting as much as possible – so that when we do say 'No' (and there are times when we have to say 'No'), we will be noticed, and notice will be taken. So often, we can be seen as the 'No Brigade': we need to try to alter that perception. What we have in Manchester started with one conversation after General Synod over twenty years ago. It is still the case that we try to work through our problems in a relational way, rather than by confrontation.

In our neighbouring Diocese of Blackburn the catholic presence remains strong. Our parishes are in good heart, and are served well by the Bishop of Burnley. Bishop Philip does not minister solely to our parishes, but as a suffragan bishop has a wider care and role within the Diocese and beyond.

In the Diocese of Chester we have few parishes, but all are in good heart. Again, they work together, but not at the expense of working within the Diocese and their deaneries. In Liverpool we have fewer parishes and clergy, but they are in reasonable heart, engaging and playing a full part within their deaneries and the Diocese.

Well is everything rosy in the North? No, it's not. There are certain areas of concern. It is difficult to attract clergy to come and serve in the North. Perhaps we should ask the political parties to consider providing an incentive in their manifestos for the forthcoming General Election for clergy to come and work in the North. (They seem to be paying for everything else!)

Pastoral re-organization, parishes having their staffing reduced to 0.5 posts, and the difficulty of attracting clergy to half-time posts are a problem. And there is a difficulty in the direction of travel that some dioceses are going into – delegating responsibility to deaneries for the staffing level of parishes. 'You have ten priests: decide what you are going to do with them.' Formation of deanery plans – turkeys voting for Christmas. Often our Society parishes feel that they are sitting at the end of the deanery queue. But in truth it is probably not just Society parishes that feel that, but parishes of every ilk and conviction that feel this as stipendiary numbers fall, in the face of the difficulty of attracting people to the North of England.

But throughout the North-West we find that our parishes are well integrated into their deaneries and dioceses. Many of our parishes are in deprived areas, but many of our congregations are above the diocesan average. Why? I don't know, but I suspect it is because we teach the catholic faith and we don't water down Gospel truths. You will find strong evidence of our parishes' involvement in our communities, not least in the provision of foodbanks and other social projects. You will find us working in our schools – not just the

Church of England schools but also the local authority schools. You will find us working in areas of presence and engagement, in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith environments, carrying the Christian banner and explaining the good news of Jesus Christ to those who want to hear, and more importantly, to those who hear reluctantly.

My friends, particularly my brother priests: it's a good place to be, up north. Come and visit us; come and join us. You know, it's not grim up north!

### **Fr Paul Kennedy**

Bishop Glyn has given me six things that he wanted me to share.

First, he said, 'Tell them what it is like to be a catholic priest in the North-East of England. I guess it's not very much different from being a catholic priest in any other part of England. We are of course a minority group, with about twenty Society churches in Durham Diocese, most of which are in the poorest areas, with all the strains and stresses that go with that, the social issues of the community, the lack of aspiration and hope that poverty can bring, and the impact on church life with the crumbling large buildings, the low capacity. But for all that, we wouldn't want to be anywhere else because that is where we believe God has sent us. There is, however, among the catholic parishes hope, vision, growth, and a number of new exciting initiatives. And I know that this is not just the case in Durham but across the parishes in the dioceses of the Northern Province.

The second thing Bishop Glyn said is to mention the difficulty of recruiting priests to serve in the North. He gives the example of my previous parish which (laying aside the unfortunate thing of having to follow me as incumbent) could be seen as something of a flagship that would attract a young priest. Several adverts, several approaches, but three years of vacancy. Thank God, the announcement of a new appointment is at last imminent. However, attracting priests to serve in the North is a difficulty not just for the Society parishes but for the Church in general. When it comes to vacancies, I think we have to pay tribute to the faithfulness and stoicism of the laity, especially those in leadership roles, who shoulder more and more responsibility, and do so with cheerfulness and faith, and of course to the retired priests, as well as those serving in non-stipendiary roles and chaplaincies, without whom these parishes wouldn't survive the vacancies at all.

Third, Bishop Glyn wanted to mention our young priests. He cannot give enough praise to them for offering themselves for discernment and for ordained life, and for bringing to our constituency a freshness and a new enthusiasm and joy to the priesthood, which inspires us old lads to keep going and of course brings new life to the Church. Also, to those who are in training and in the process of discernment, listening to God's voice and seeking his will for them.

The fourth heading I have is Mutual Flourishing. This is something that Bishop Glyn encourages us all to do to the fullest extent. As in so many things, he leads us by example. While the traditionalist Chapter of Our Lady and St Cuthbert in the Diocese of Durham meets regularly, most clergy also make it a priority to be involved in their local deanery chapters and to engage with the deanery synod and the diocesan synod, in order to ensure that mutual flourishing is a reality for us all. The bishops in the North look very favourably upon us for doing that.

The fifth thing that Bishop Glyn mentioned is to share a little of my experience, and that of others, of the Bread for the World conference in the summer. I have to confess that when someone says there's going to be a conference my heart sinks. We recently had a diocesan conference, and at times I identified with what a priest said in another place while attending a similar event – that he felt like an ecumenical observer. However, the Bread for the World conference was something quite different. It was absolutely brilliant: I couldn't believe it. I imagine the organizers must have felt a little disappointed at the lower than expected numbers, but the plus side was that it was much more intimate, with about a hundred people, so people tended not to do the usual thing of sticking in their own groups, but rather I think nearly everyone met new people and made new friends. The worship, the food, the drink, the speakers, the events, the entertainment and so on were excellent. It was all quite superb. So if it happens again and you weren't there last time, make sure you go next time. A big 'Thank you' to those who organized it and worked so hard to make it the success it clearly was. We came back, clergy and laity, to our parish uplifted, nourished, and with a new focus and energy.

And the last – the sixth commandment: Bishop Glyn is today at Cuthbert House in Durham, addressing enquirers, potential ordinands, and those recently recommended for training about mutual flourishing. Some time ago a potential ordinand from my parish was sent by the Diocesan Director of Ordinands on a placement within the Diocese to a 'different kind of parish' (if I can put it that way), to find that the vicar had never heard of the Five Guiding Principles and the lady curate, who had heard of them, had never read them. I did encourage the DDO to ensure that this was addressed and it is as part of this that Bishop Glyn will be doing his bit for us today.

Finally, a comment from me on the subject of the Bishop of Beverley, Bishop Glyn. I think everyone in the North would want to say how blessed we are by his tireless ministry, the enormous number of miles that he does, his great kindness, his great pastoral care (and his terrible sense of humour), which makes us the envy of the rest of the Church. I think the relationship that we have with all the bishops of The Society is something very special. We thank God for them all.