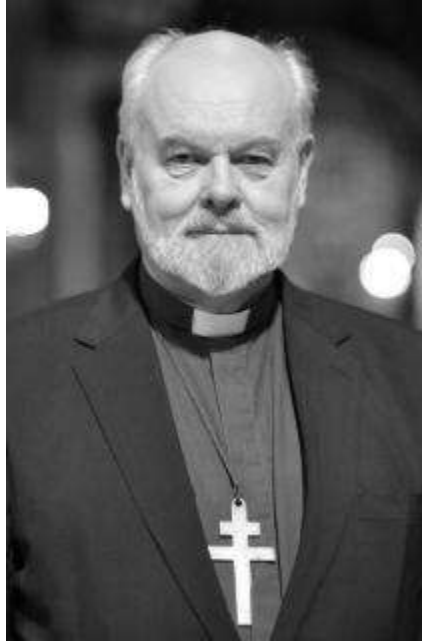


From the Bishop of London

Ad Clerum



Bishop's Week 22-v-2010

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing these notes on the 22nd of May, the eighteenth anniversary of my consecration as Bishop of Stepney. Such were the pressures on Archbishop Carey's diary that it was impossible to find a major festival day for this event and Graham Dow and I had to be content with the Feast of St Quiteria of Galicia. It was the last occasion on which the Book of Common Prayer was used for a consecration service.

This year I find myself once again intimately involved with the Stepney Area following Bishop Stephen's announcement of his retirement on the grounds of ill health.

Last Sunday [16-v-2010] at St Martin-in-the-Fields, I enjoyed the third in a particularly encouraging series of confirmations. St Peter's Eaton Square and St Luke's West Holloway were diverse in style but both alike bubbled with spiritual energy. There are some bishops who seem to resent what they describe as being reduced to "a confirmation machine". On the contrary it is one of the best parts of the job.

Confirmations are almost always deeply refreshing. I was moved for example to meet a young Afghan who had turned to Christ because as he wrote in a letter introducing himself, "Jesus was a poor man. Jesus knows how to feel what is me – feel the problems and the life I face. When Jesus died for us, I can never understand this, no one does something like this but I am trying to understand. It is a big work." Talking to him before the service it was clear that he was a young man of considerable intelligence. His mother had died when he was six and instead of going to school he had been forced by relatives to work, looking after the sheep. Understandably "trust" was difficult after years of ill usage but praise God, contact with the Christian community in London was helping him to regain a sense of trust.

After the service outside the church, an elderly lady denounced me as a false apostle because she had witnessed no speaking in tongues of ecstasy or any miracles – the signs to her mind of the presence of the Spirit.

Actually listening to people from all over the world saying the Lords' Prayer in their own mother tongue reminded me of the first Pentecost where, despite linguistic barriers, the pilgrims to the festival in Jerusalem were inducted by the Spirit into a zone of openness to the teaching of the apostles and understanding.

Also listening to the stories of some of the young Chinese who were also confirmed at St Martin's there was evidence of lives transformed but my interlocutor was in transmission mode only. My suggestion that the fruits of the Spirit were love, joy and peace was dismissed with an indignant snort and she stalked off.



On Sunday afternoon, the five new Prebendaries of St Paul's came to lunch before their installation together with their immediate supporters. Olwen Field described by the Bishop of Willesden as "a genius at building community"; Alan Green from Tower Hamlets recognised as one of the Diocese's most articulate contributors to constructive interfaith relations; Charles Marnham one of the originators of the Alpha Course; Alan Moses, Area Dean of St Marylebone and Jonathan Trigg, authority on Martin Luther and respected trainer of curates; together presented a picture of the strength and vigour of parochial life in the Diocese of London served by such multi-talented clergy.

Much to my delight at one stage during the meal I found myself sitting next to a guest who proved to hail from Lord Novgorod the Great, one of the most haunted of historic Russian cities. It really is a privilege to work at the crossroads of the world.

After early prayers and reading of the scriptures which begin each day and without which the work would be impossible, I caught a train on Monday morning to York. We were booked into some motel for a residential meeting of the House of Bishops devoted to General Synod business. Official rhetoric emphasises the mission and evangelistic responsibilities which we all share but the engulfing flood of defensive bureaucracy seriously threatens our capacity to get out of the office. The CDM: TOS: CRB and other monsters are paper-logging bishops' offices and it is unsurprising that experienced bishops are choosing to retire as soon as they are able. It was the Bishop of Durham's last meeting and as a hugely talented lecturer, teacher and writer, he seems to me to have made the right decision to serve Jesus Christ from a place where his energies will not be sapped by the increasingly desk bound reality of episcopal ministry.

It was however good to contribute to an important debate on the changing shape of ordination training. Thanks to the Dean of St Mellitus I was able to report a recent survey of the 43 ordination candidates currently studying on the full time, mixed mode, action/reflection course at St Mellitus. 75% of them said that the availability of this mode of training was a major factor in their decision to offer themselves for ordination training.

I am not clear that the whole church has really woken up to the incontrovertible fact that 40% of all stipendiary ministers in the Church of England are due to retire within the next decade.

Humming Sir Arthur Sullivan's haunting air "The Long Day Closes", I retired for the night only to be roused at 12.30 by the clangour of the fire alarm. We tumbled out of our rooms in various states of undress. The Bishop of Winchester gallantly draped his dressing gown around the shoulders of a scantily clad female who appeared from somewhere. I found the Bishop of Chichester on Floor 5 suffering from acute back pain which precluded him from using the stairs. The solitary lift was out of action so I sped off to alert the firemen who were milling about below. Fortunately it was a false alarm but as the chief fire officer said severely – "anyone with mobility problems should not have been placed on floor five".

My mind went back to the Clergy Conference in Merville in which a genuine fire broke out in a sealed unit in my bathroom in the early hours. As smoke began to penetrate the floor below where Graham Buckle was blissfully asleep we rounded up all the participants and made a dignified exit. Les pompiers said that they had never seen an evacuation of a burning building effected with such liturgical decorum.

The meeting continued on Tuesday morning but eventually the excellent York to London service got me back to Kings Cross in less than two hours, in time for the annual Sion College Feast. Hilary Clinton may have failed to win the race for the White House but Sion has succeeded in electing, for the first time, an American Woman President. It was a pleasure to see Marjorie Brown inaugurated to great acclaim; to be able to congratulate Chris Burke on a busy and creative year and to share in a convivial and buoyant celebration.

On Wednesday I joined the hard working Deans of the Stepney Area and the other members of the Stepney Area Leadership Team [SALT] for a review of the situation following Bishop Stephen's resignation. It became clear to me that I should have to resign from some of my extra-Diocesan responsibilities in order to assist colleagues in Stepney and also to play my part in renewing the Diocesan Staff Team.

With very great regret I wrote that afternoon to the Grand Mufti of Egypt resigning as his Co-Chair of the International Islam and the West Dialogue. I have also resigned as a Trustee of Co-exist, a major interfaith charity. The work both these bodies are doing is important and fascinating but others will be able to take my place whereas the foreseeable strains on colleagues over the next few months mean that the Bishop of London should reserve his energies for Diocesan and national business. I have nearly completed the work involved in chairing the national spending review covering the year 2011-13 but with a change of government being Chair of the Commissioners' Board of Governors and of the Church Buildings Division is likely to prove demanding.



On Wednesday afternoon I took my writ of summons to Parliament and took the oath which is required of those intending to serve in the Parliamentary sessions which begin on Tuesday. In the new circumstances of the coalition it is as yet unclear where everyone will sit in the House of Lords. The Lord Speaker said that there had been a certain

amount of activity "laying out towels on the sunbeds". The bishops, however, are still in possession of the bench which used to be closest to the fire in the mediaeval House.

Thursday was spent climbing a Himalaya of paper and participating in my final meeting of Co-exist at which I was able to apologise to the Grand Mufti in person for bailing out. Chris Hewer, the St Ethelburga Fellow in Christian-Muslim Relations has been supported by the Trust and has made a major contribution to its work through his book "Understanding Islam" which has now been converted into an eight hour course delivered via the internet.

In the evening I listened to a brilliant talk by Peter Hennessy on the Constitution and the Coalition. I am still baffled by "hoorah" words like "progressive". How do we know that some policy is in fact progressive when the destination is so ill defined?

On Friday after celebrating at St Paul's I had an encouraging meeting with the parish representatives of St Mary Bourne Street and St Barnabas Pimlico to short list candidates for the vacancy. More telephone calls, paper and messages by e mail but at six o'clock we always try to draw stumps and keep a Sabbath with a family meal and no official engagements. With thanks for our partnership in the Gospel

The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Richard Chartres KCVO DD FSA