



OUR LIFE IN CHRIST THE BISHOP'S CHARGE 2015

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

I. Wanting to know, love, follow Jesus

As controversy deepens and intensifies, some people inevitably lose heart and give up. Their discipleship lapses. Jesus then says to the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” and Simon Peter answers him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (cf. John 6.67-69).

This exchange between Jesus and the twelve suggests a situation that we might recognise as characteristic of our own experience: controversy, loss of numbers, waning confidence, uncertainty about the future.

Peter, however, identifies the heart of the matter when faced with a direct question about discipleship. It is wanting the relationship with Jesus that matters. He is the source of life; he is the one in whom God is revealed to us.

Our life together in the household of faith that is the diocese of Chichester can only have authentic purpose and meaning if it is focused on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, from which the nature of being the church must inevitably follow.

The fruitful outcome of a diocesan visitation should be found in the renewal of this relationship's depth and intensity. This charge seeks to turn our attention to that renewal.

Attention to the necessary matters of governance, finance, growth, etc. are consequences that only matter insofar as they enrich and deepen our experience of the Holy One of God, and provide us with the liberty, authority, and commonality of life that are the authentic signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in the people of God.

In this respect, the “charge” that rests upon us as a diocese retains a transactional meaning of cost or expense, not merely in the realm of financial or material obligation, but also in the no less real spheres of our moral, theological and spiritual life.

In the gospels, Jesus directs the attention of his apostles to living a life that is modelled on his own: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10.44-45).

Here, again, there are dangers in the entanglements spun by a contractual analysis of the cost of our ransom payment. The simple account of the relationship is to be found in John’s gospel: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3.16).

The charge upon God is the cost of death. The charge to us is nothing but the obligation of our love, freely given in response to the love of God that swallows the cost of death. Again, it is John who accounts for this in the culmination of his gospel, when Jesus says to Peter, “Do you love me?” (John 21.15-17)

The words in Greek carry a nuance that is difficult to convey through the English verb, to love. But the directness of the question has a force that each of us must face when assessing what charge we are willing to bear.

Bishop Gordon Mursell summed this up very perceptively in a recent address to clergy: “So, whatever love means, and to whatever level of it we are able to commit ourselves, it will find expression in practical pastoral service of all those for whom Christ died.”

Mursell is building here on a perception that is foundational to our lives as ordained ministers in the Church of England. In the Book of Common Prayer rite for the Ordering of Priests, the bishop speaks these words to the candidates:

Have always therefore printed in your remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for which he shed his blood. The Church and Congregation whom you must serve, is his Spouse, his Body.

The relationship is modelled on a freely contracted bond of mutual love that is exemplified in marriage. St Paul understands this as an expression of the work of salvation; “This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5.32).

But the Prayer Book widens the symbolic images that define the charge of love within our moral, theological and spiritual lives. The reference to the “sheep of Christ” takes us back to the challenging questions that Jesus puts to Peter at the conclusion of John’s gospel.

Indeed, that gospel passage is one of the appointed readings for the Prayer Book form of ordaining or consecrating bishops, in which, again, the candidate is reminded that the Church of Christ was “purchased with no less price than the effusion of his [Christ’s] own blood”.

We ought, at this point, to be clear about the scope of the term “church” as it is used here. The English word ‘church’ shares with the German equivalent, ‘*kirche*’, a Greek origin, *kyriakos*, meaning ‘belonging to the lord’ – to Jesus Christ. As those who claim Jesus as

Lord, we identify ourselves as “church”. Jesus himself claims all humanity, all creation, as those who are redeemed by the blood of the cross, in order to restore them to the Father.¹

The latter sense that the church of Jesus Christ, in its fullness, enfolds all creation is deeply embedded in Christian understanding. Irenaeus of Lyons makes this observation as early as the second century and a century later Augustine of Hippo sums it up as unity that is expressed in language, enabling the church to say, “My language is Greek. Syriac is mine. Hebrew is mine. Mine is the tongue of every nation, because I am within the unity that embraces all nations.”²

Thus the term ‘church’ contains within it a statement of what is partial and fragmented in its institutional form on earth, together with a reference to the church’s character at the end of time when the fullness of redemption is revealed and the church expresses the perfection of all creation and enters into the life of the kingdom of heaven.

This charge touches on the nature of our relationship to both aspects of the life of the church. As “Messengers, sentinels and stewards of the Lord” we serve Jesus Christ, “the apostle and high priest of our confession” (Hebrews 3.1), who has “entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9.12).

The redemption he has won for us releases all humanity and compels us to serve and love the church that is those who claim Jesus as Lord, and to serve and love the church that is not yet evident – those who do not confess Jesus as Lord but for whom Jesus died and whom he claims out of love for everything that the Father has brought into being and entrusted to him, the Son.

This is the scope of the great treasure entrusted to us and which we are to have printed in our remembrance. When Jesus says to you, as he said to Peter, who had denied him, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep – feed my lambs!” we should be mindful of the present and not yet evident nature of the church, the flock of the Lord, entrusted to us.

It is not just once, but at repeated moments of our lives as Christians and as ministers of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, that we need to weigh the cost of love and the scope of the charge that we are willing to bear, for him.

This document is but a snap shot of the dynamics of a relationship in which the charge and cure of souls is applied on a daily basis, in a huge variety of relational contexts in this diocese of Chichester. I hope that you will find something within it that speaks about the charge you are facing. I hope it will widen the channels of God’s grace by which you are empowered to bear the charge given to you. I hope it will encourage you in wanting to know, love, follow Jesus.

¹ “All things have been handed over to me by my Father” (Matthew 11.27). This seems to be echoed by St Paul: “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15.24-26).

² Irenaeus (c. 130 – 200) writes in his treatise, *Against the heresies*: “Wherefore Luke points out that the pedigree which traces the generation of our Lord back to Adam contains seventy-two generations, connecting the end with the beginning, and implying that it is He who has summed up in Himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards, and all languages and generations of men, together with Adam himself” (3.22). Augustine’s comment comes from his *Commentary on the Psalms* (147.19).

2. The Visitation: For the edifying and well-governing of Christ's flock

'Every archbishop, bishop, and archdeacon has the right to visit, at times and places limited by law and custom, the province, diocese, or archdeaconry committed to his charge, in a more solemn manner, and in such visitation to perform all such acts as by law and custom are assigned to his charge in that behalf for the edifying and well-governing of Christ's flock...'

- *The Canons of the Church of England, G5*

The episcopal visitation to the diocese of Chichester began in October, 2013 and is brought to a formal conclusion by the delivery of this charge.

The articles of inquiry and the introduction to them identified the visitation as an expression of the pastoral work of the bishop as the chief shepherd of the diocese. The bishop has a particular responsibility for the clergy with whom the "cure of souls" is shared. It is to the needs and well-being of those clergy that the visitation was primarily directed.

The articles were addressed to every incumbent (or equivalent) in the diocese. In the case of a vacancy, an amended version of the articles was sent to the churchwardens as sequestrators. The articles were effectively a questionnaire; the response is described in the canon G6 as a presentment. In some cases a presentment was received from assistant curates who are not serving an IME 4 -7 curacy.

A visit to each of the 21 deaneries in the diocese provided an opportunity for me to meet individually with each priest or deacon who was making a presentment or, in the case of a vacancy in the benefice, to meet with the sequestrators.

I met with 215 clergy and with the sequestrators in 30 benefices. In the course of the visits to each benefice I was able to see 424 churches.

The meetings with clergy or with sequestrators generally took place on a weekday, in the context of a visit that was centred on an act of worship: Morning or Evening Prayer, or the celebration of the Eucharist in the middle of the day. The gathering for worship also provided an opportunity for me to meet informally with parishioners while enjoying an excellent breakfast, tea, or light lunch.

A deanery briefing by the rural dean and the deanery lay chair was important for setting the scene at the outset of the visit. Attending a deanery synod was a requirement in each visit and in some cases the synod was also attended by churchwardens. The briefing and the synod provided opportunities for discussion of the deanery action plan. It was also a chance for me to hear good news stories from each parish, and to learn what the deficits are at diocesan and local level in resourcing, leadership, communication, and spiritual and pastoral support, together with any other concerns.

Of similar importance was the opportunity to be present at a deanery chapter meeting. These centred on time for prayer and worship in the Eucharist, and having a meal together. The substance of the meeting gave me an opportunity to listen to the clergy and to hear something of their faith journey. I was privileged to be party to some remarkable conversations about the nature of falling in love with God and the nature of conversion to Christian faith and vocation.

In some cases it was possible to visit CofE schools, though that was not the main focus of the formal visitation. However, it did become clear, from the presentments, from deanery meetings, and from conversations with parishioners, how important our church schools are, especially in rural communities.

Each deanery visit also provided an opportunity to meet socially with retired clergy and spouses, and with Readers. This was not part of the formal visitation, but the contribution that these two groups make to sustaining the pastoral, spiritual and sacramental life of the parishes was evident in those gatherings, and that impression was confirmed by many of the presentments. These meetings revealed the need for much greater attention to the ministry and needs of retired clergy and spouses, and to the future of Reader ministry, presently the main expression of authorised lay ministry.

Attention to the spiritual, personal and professional welfare of licensed clergy, with whom the bishop shares the cure of souls and the oversight of our life as Christians, was central to the intention and design of the visitation and its timetable. In particular, it was vital to experience something of the missional context of parsonage house, church, associated resources such as hall, church school, community amenities, etc.

The focus of attention on those in ordained or authorised public ministry should not be misinterpreted as indicating that the clergy are the church. A significant number of the articles of inquiry required the clergy to give an account in the presentment of the apostolic health of the laity in their care.

Apostolic health could be assessed against various aspects of Christian life. These would include prayer life, regular participation in worship, biblical literacy, doctrinal awareness, giving of money, giving of time, pastoral responsibility within and beyond the congregation, a sense of being well-treated, recognition and use of gifts in the sharing of the gospel.

There were some visits in which it was possible to celebrate for the whole deanery the rites of baptism and confirmation. This was a really important opportunity to give expression to the work of growth which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It was also an affirmation of the dignity of the lay vocation, as each candidate was sealed with the Holy Spirit in becoming an agent of the gospel as a living witness to Jesus Christ.

The presentments give a fascinating and lively account of the commitment of laity to their faith and to their congregation. Much more work is needed to nurture, recognise and empower this commitment, promoting its liberty without distorting its character. The role of the clergy in bringing that about emerges as one of the major priorities in this charge. That priority also identifies the need for resourcing and structural provision to nurture and release the gifts of lay people within and beyond the ecclesial life of a benefice.

The arrangement of the articles of inquiry under the three headings of safeguarding, growth, and giving provided scope for questions about details that are essential to the life of every parish. The 'supplementary' questions also provided an opportunity to describe the particular mission of each individual benefice as it moves beyond attention to routine and duty, into outreach and imaginative engagement with those who are not yet Christians.

So, questions about the implementation of diocesan policy on safeguarding were supplemented by enquiry about the scope of work with families and young people.³ Questions about growth sought for an account of spiritual and numerical expansion,⁴ while the section on giving enquired into the economy of our life together as a diocese and household of faith, and asked what we contribute to others who are beyond our own circle.⁵

Other questions of implementation of policy also arose from the presentments, in regard to clergy terms of service. The provision of an effective form of Ministerial Development Review (MDR) had proved to be patchy, at best, across the diocese. This is a statutory provision and more than that. It should also exemplify the relationship of understanding and trust between licensed clergy and the bishop and archdeacon who hold the responsibility for deployment, care, spiritual and material welfare, and the accountability of the clergy.

Notice has already been served on the termination of CARM as the MDR provision in the diocese of Chichester. This notice also indicated that the articles of inquiry in this visitation should be regarded as a form of ministerial review for the period of 2013 – 2015. A new system of MDR is in preparation and will be launched and implemented by January 2016.

During the course of the visitation we also underwent the implementation of changes to the governance and structural life of the diocese. While these were not intrinsic to the visitation itself, or dependent upon it, they were, in some cases, prompted by the recommendations of the Archbishop of Canterbury's commissaries (Bishop John Gladwin and Judge Rupert Bursell) who, between 2011 and 2013 conducted an archiepiscopal visitation to review safeguarding issues across the whole diocese of Chichester.

That initiative, requested by Bishop John Hind, formed the backdrop to this episcopal visitation and charge. The revocation of the area scheme, the formation of a fourth archdeaconry (Brighton and Lewes), and the appointment to it of its first archdeacon (the Venerable Martin Lloyd Williams) are a response to that report.

Similarly, the review of our administrative procedures, in Church House, Hove and in the record keeping of bishops and archdeacons has been undertaken in response to the commissaries' report.

In addition to the presentment by each incumbent, I also received a detailed profile from the departments in Church House, Hove giving details of various aspects of apostolic life that are documented and supported from there. These briefing notes included database information about the incumbent or priest/deacon in charge, population figures, attendance figures 2000 – 2013, Parish Ministry Costs (PMC) and contribution towards meeting them, frequency of occasional offices, youth and children's work, church school profile, Diocesan

³ E.g. 31. What provision do you make for parents who have not been baptised or confirmed to receive similar preparation (to that given to their children)? 32. Please describe the contact you have with local schools and how it provides evangelistic opportunities. 34. What are your plans for expanding work with young people and families over the next five years?

⁴ E.g. 40. What do you do to foster within the people in your care an appetite to grow in holiness? 45. In what ways do you think it is possible to extend Biblical literacy across the spectrum of age and ability? 49. How often does your PCC discuss the possibility of making new Christians as a matter of urgency?

⁵ E.g. 62. What are the terms that local people would use to describe the Church in your benefice or parish? 64. To what extent are any of your buildings or facilities used by the local community? 66. Are your buildings an asset or a liability in your work of service to others?

Advisory Committee (DAC) submissions, vocations to ordained ministry, Church Urban Fund (CUF) analysis of indices of multiple deprivation.

Much of the comment about the issues of safeguarding, growth and giving in the presentments, and in parish and deanery visits, touched on the areas of governance and communication. It was therefore informative for me and my colleagues that the visitation should be taking place at the same time as we were engaged in addressing structural and systemic issues.

The time scale within which the visitation was set looked forward to 2020 and to two significant events: the clergy conference in September 2014 and the launch of a diocesan strategy at Pentecost 2015.

Both these events have contributed to a sense of a growing momentum in revitalising our apostolic life of worship, witness and service.

In terms of this charge, the launch of the diocesan strategy is the most significant engine for addressing the issues that emerge from the presentments and the experience of my deanery visits. Growth, ministry, and contributing to life beyond ourselves are the three areas into which the strategy seeks to put our energy and resources: growth, ministry and service of others.

A series of deanery consultations, convened by the bishop of Lewes and a team he gathered from across the diocese, led to the formation of a diocesan strategy for this quinquennium 2015-2020. It has, in many ways, built on the presentments from clergy and the wider deanery gatherings during the visitation.

This charge will, I hope, contribute to the momentum of the strategy and an understanding of how it arises from and seeks to address the needs of the worshipping and witnessing life of parishes and deaneries across the diocese.

The strategy is a method of local and diocesan accountability. It holds out the assurance of resources, through which we seek, in our parishes, to grow in our faith, in our ministry, and in our engagement with the world. In short, it is a strategy for action that leads to new potential for further action.

The implementation of the strategy must also carry a warning against taking refuge in anxiety-driven activism that believes we are in charge of God's mission. All our activity must be grounded in a prayerful response to the call of Jesus Christ that is carried on the breath of the Holy Spirit, to the delight of God the Father.

The strategy simply seeks to ensure that the Mission Action Plans (MAPs) that were widely discussed in my visits to parishes and deaneries are now implemented, by identifying the one thing into which a congregation will put its energy for growth in holiness and number, or re-imagining ministry, or contributing to the common good.

This one thing will need to be attainable, costed, timed, audited, and owned by a whole congregation. That congregation will need to be encouraged and sustained in deploying their skills and gifts. As the fruit of prayer and hard work, the accomplishment of the one thing will also have been wisely identified as something that leads to potential for further growth of whatever kind the Holy Spirit gives.

The delivery of the strategy also places demands on us who are the bishops, archdeacons and members of the administrative team at Church House, Hove who serve you in parishes, institutions, schools, and new evangelistic initiatives that constitute the apostolic life of this diocese. We bear the charge of resourcing and supporting you in the implementation of the strategy and of holding together the apostolic life, in all the diversity of this household of faith.

In order to ensure that this charge contributes to the momentum of the strategy, it will address the issues emerging from the visitation under the three headings that follow the strategy's lead. First, growth in holiness and number; attention to our relationships, "divine and human". Second, reimagining ministry; the use of our gifts in the service of God's mission of love and salvation. Third, contributing to the common good; our commitment to the communities and wider society in which we live.

The charge will refer to evidence from presentments, but without reference to the source. Those documents and the notes of meetings with clergy remain a discrete collection of confidential material that is governed by the data protection act. It will also draw from notes on the meetings I attended in parishes and deaneries, attempting to identify insights that are applicable across the diocese.

The charge will also outline some responses recommendations that are offered for consideration at a variety of levels – personal, parochial, deanery and diocesan. Implementation of these recommendations is not an end in itself. It is, rather, a collection of proposals that might encourage and assist us in the joyful task of continuing to know, love, follow Jesus.

Before turning to the first of the three sections that form the substance of this charge, I would also like to record thanks to Dr Anthony Speca for his masterly ordering of the administration of the visitation, and to Elise Gallagher and Danny Pegg who oversaw its beginning and its conclusion. I am also grateful to all the rural deans who put in so much time to oversee the preparation of the visits, and to the people who hosted events, provided meals, and who hosted me personally. The back-up of information from Church House, Hove was also unfailingly helpful, as was contribution to the preparation of the articles of inquiry from the Bishop of Lewes and Canon Andrew Mayes.

I would like to record my profound thanks to the people of the diocese, clergy and laity, for an exceptionally gracious response. The visitation was an exhausting, exhilarating and very humbling experience of hope and joy in believing.

This is a diocese that is, I think, hungry for change and for the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ. Junk food – or its equivalent – will not satisfy the longing for what is real and authentic. Only in Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life, will we find our way into the future we seek to inhabit and for which we were made.

You are at liberty to reproduce the text of this Charge. However, please acknowledge Bishop Martin as its author.