



# OUR LIFE IN CHRIST THE BISHOP'S CHARGE 2015

## SYNOPSIS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### I. **Synopsis: An overview of the Charge**

This charge marks the conclusion of the episcopal visitation 2013 – 2014. The visitation required all incumbents to complete a detailed questionnaire (the articles of inquiry) about their ministerial life and the life of their parishes. This was followed up with a visit to every deanery, which included a face to face meeting with each of the 215 clergy or the 30 parish sequestrators (where parishes were undergoing a vacancy). Completed questionnaires (The presentments), and time for meetings and for worship, provided a snapshot of where the diocese is, identifying its strengths and areas for further development.

The charge was an opportunity to reflect upon all that I saw and heard during the visitation and in the light of it, to sum up my findings in outlining a vision for the future of the diocese. In particular, the charge is a way of giving substance to the diocesan strategy (launched at Pentecost 2015), contributing to our thinking about how the strategy can be implemented. Though practical in terms of what needs to be done, the charge is also about theological reflection on what it means to know, love, follow Jesus.

In prayer, worship, learning, and service, our life in Christ has to be the heart of all that we do and are as a diocese.

The full text of the charge falls into **four** sections. Each of them is available on the diocesan website, as is this summary.

- I. **The nature of the Church.** Here we focus on our identity as Christians and as ministers of the gospel. We reflect on the charge that Jesus gives to Peter – ‘Do you love me? Feed my sheep’ – and how our lives must be an ever deeper response to that question. The section also reviews what happened during the visits to deaneries, how the charge feeds into the diocesan strategy, and the importance for parishes to identify one aspect of their life, to which they will be committed, accomplishing it well, and using it for further growth.

- 2. Growth in holiness and in numbers.** This section focuses attention on our undertaking at ordination to be ‘diligent in prayer’. Prayer, worship and growth in personal holiness is the foundation of ministry if we are to return to our roots in the mystery of Christ and attract others to Christian faith. In particular, we should develop in ourselves and others the skills that ensure worship is profound, instructive, inspiring, transformative, and that above all gives glory to God. 2018 is to be designated as a ‘Year of Prayer’, focusing on spiritual formation and looking ahead to the next quinquennium.
- 3. Re-imagining Ministry.** Like others in the Church of England, we are seeking ways to be imaginative about how to exercise ministry in a fast-moving and changing world, using all the gifts God has given us. This must include the development of new patterns of lay ministry, building on how already lay people are involved in ministry as primary evangelists. The launch of a new ministerial development review (MDR) for licensed clergy will be an important opportunity for reflecting on ministry and how it might be re-invigorated and renewed. This undertaking requires us to be rooted in the Bible, as the testimony of God’s revelation, and to attend to how that revelation is received, expounded and related to contemporary experience which we measure against it. To this end, 2017 is to be a ‘Year of the Bible’ in which we focus on how the stories of God shape us and are shared with those who do not know them.
- 4. Contributing to the Common Good.** We are rightly asked to give an account of what we as Christians think about the major issues confronting the world at the moment – the care of the earth and its resources; the current migrant crisis and the search for peace among us – and how Christians are called to respond. We are dependent on God’s mercy and called to be merciful. 2016 is designated as a ‘Year of Mercy’. It will be marked by the opening of a door in Chichester Cathedral on 6 December. The door is symbolic. It is the sign of Jesus Christ who said, “I am the door.” It is the invitation to discover the love of God the Father. It is also the door by which people are sent out to share with others the joy and hope of Christian faith.

## **2. Recommendations from the Charge: The next steps**

### **1. Will you be diligent in prayer?**

- 1.1 Every licensed priest should have a defined discipline that outlines a pattern of daily prayer. Attention should be given to the where and how this prayer is undertaken, acknowledging the responsibility upon those who have the cure of souls to pray for the people in their charge.
- 1.2 The use of someone completely independent of the diocesan structures of governance for spiritual companionship is a responsibility that should be taken seriously by every licensed priest or deacon.
- 1.3 Provision for time to reflect and pray, away from the demands of daily life and ministry, should also be part of the defined discipline of spiritual life.
- 1.4 The existence of this discipline should be a considered part of the MDR, and discussed in that forum.
- 1.5 Guidance on what the financial other practical arrangements are for making time to be away should be agreed as part of the role description of every licensed priest or deacon.
- 1.6 Prayer with colleagues, within the parish, among a group of clergy, in the deanery, at chapter meetings, etc, should be regularly considered as a means of bearing one another's burdens, sharing joys and celebrating our unity in Christ. This should also recognise the partnership in the gospel that we share with Christians outside our own communion.

### **2. Prayer in time and place**

- 2.1 The establishment of a prayer network of some kind in every benefice should be a priority for the nurturing of our life in Christ and for equipping ourselves for serving God's mission of love and salvation.
- 2.2 Attention to the possibility of sharing responsibility for saying the daily office should be a consideration, where appropriate, with care being taken to publicise the sharing of the responsibility, to nurture those who take part in it, and ensure that the invitation to others to participate remains open and attractive.
- 2.3 Provision for use of the church for some form of daily prayer should be considered by the PCC, with particular attention given to what creates a prayerful environment for this ministry – heating, lighting, seating, ambiance, etc.
- 2.4 Arrangements for those who may wish to pray the office, or commit to some other routine of daily prayer should be part of the life of every benefice.
- 2.5 Finding opportunities for praying with other Christians, especially in the context of serving together for the common good, should also be undertaken.
- 2.6 Establishing and publicising a ministry of intercessory prayer should be an obvious part of the ministry and outreach of every benefice, ensuring as far as possible, that those who are not members of the congregation, know how to ask for prayers to be offered for their concerns.
- 2.7 The use of social media and electronic communication for informing the prayer life of networks and individuals within a congregation is a responsibility that would form a distinctive ministry.

- 2.8 The diocesan cycle of prayer should be reviewed through a simple and brief process of consultation.
- 2.9 Deanery cycles of prayer, organised locally, are to be commended as ways of deepening the sense of a common life and mutual responsibility.
- 2.10 Review of resources for the work of the diocesan adviser for spiritual life should be undertaken, with the possibility of a consultation process to identify what spiritual needs people, ordained and lay, have, across the diocese.
- 2.11 Publication of resources should be addressed, including places, events, people, and funding.

### **3. Transforming worship**

- 3.1 An advisory worship group should be established to review good practice in liturgy, music, use of liturgical space, and the processes of reordering.
- 3.2 Close liaison should be established between the advisory group and the DAC.
- 3.3 Diocesan events (synod, confirmations, licensings, ordinations, etc) should be reviewed to ensure that they model good practice.
- 3.4 Public access to churches should be reviewed to ensure it is easy and well publicised, together with an audit of information on church notice boards, the quality of their condition, and the profile of every benefice on the internet.
- 3.5 Assessment and review of heating and energy costs and possible savings should be undertaken in conjunction with the diocesan adviser for sustainability.
- 3.6 The diocesan website and database will be upgraded, in order to give better access to information about personnel, parish statistics that should be in the public domain, and other resources that would strengthen prayer and worship as they undergird our apostolic activity.

### **4. The Year of Prayer: 2018**

The Year of Prayer will begin on the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 2 February, 2018. That festival will remind us of the value of age and wisdom, represented by Simeon and Anna, and of the gift of life and the importance of its nurture in the very young and vulnerable, as exemplified in the Christ child and the experience of the holy family.

The Year of Prayer will be an opportunity for every parish to develop its own rule of life. This rule is intended to be a covenant that enfolds a whole congregation in a mutually agreed bond of prayer, determined by circumstance and ability.

The Year of Prayer will also invite every parish to review the resources it has for worship and to renew and improve them where necessary. A diocesan worship group will be available to offer assistance in undertaking this review and in implementing decisions. It will also be a year in which all diocesan liturgical provision is renewed.

The Year of Prayer will invite people individually to explore their own patterns of prayer and the things that encourage and sustain them. There will be opportunities to explore

patterns of prayer and worship that are new or unfamiliar and to benefit from on-line prayer material.

The Year of Prayer will also call upon God the Holy Spirit to make fruitful all that we do, to the glory of God the Father, and the increase in number of the church in our land and in this diocese.

## **5. Apostolic ministry: immersion in the Bible**

- 5.1 The department for apostolic life will undertake a review of licensed and authorised lay ministry (including Reader ministry), noting the wider processes of review called for within this diocese and developing across the whole of the Church of England.
- 5.2 In the light of this review the training and authorisation of those who preach and teach in our congregations will be re-assessed in order to make best use of the gifts that God has given us and their use in worship, in catechesis, and in evangelism.
- 5.3 The department for apostolic life will establish a network for lay people engaged in the ministry of teaching and preaching. It will regularly review the scope of this ministry, monitor its effectiveness, ensuring the provision of continuing growth, mutual support, and encouragement of vocations to it.
- 5.4 The Diocesan Youth Officer (DYO) will review and report on the needs of young Christians in developing their Biblical literacy and make recommendations for how those needs are to be met.
- 5.5 The DYO will also review the opportunities for young Christians to be involved in a teaching and preaching ministry, and training that would equip them for it.
- 5.6 The DYO will bring forward plans for a forum through which young people can be informed of and contribute to the decision-making processes of the diocese.
- 5.7 The department for apostolic life will undertake a consultation across the diocese on the resources that would be most useful in deepening our knowledge and understanding of the Bible.
- 5.8 In the light of this consultation there will be a review of the provision of material for adult learning, drawing on the best practice, experience and provision in other dioceses and church networks.
- 5.9 There will be an extra-ordinary Diocesan Synod in 2017, to which every parish will be invited to send a delegate. This will be a teaching Synod, following the pattern used in the General Synod, and will launch a programme of material for the extension of the lay apostolate in the diocese.

## **6. Apostolic ministry: the gift of being an evangelist**

- 6.1 Each parish will be invited to draw up a list of those who exercise a ministry of evangelism that is the gift of the Holy Spirit and has been developed without the need of training or authorisation.

- 6.2 The list should be reviewed and updated each Lent and the celebration of Pentecost used as an opportunity to renew commitment to the diocesan strategy, *to know, love, follow Jesus* and to give thanks for those who have exercised the gifts and ministries in the church during the past year.
- 6.3 The department for apostolic life will undertake a survey of parishes to assess what resources would be welcomed for training and strengthening those engaged using the distinctive gift of being an evangelist that God has given them.
- 6.4 Information about this form of ministry should be available and regularly updated in each archdeaconry, as a means of promoting the diversity of ministry that is apostolic and evangelistic.

## **7. Apostolic ministry: priest as enabler**

- 7.1 The introduction of a new provision of Ministerial Development Review will seek to encourage clergy to explore their capacity to sustain a congregation that celebrates, nurtures and expands the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit in all its members.
- 7.2 All clergy licensed to parochial or pioneer ministry will take part in a programme of renewal in order to the demands of contemporary ordained ministry. The programme will be tailored to meet the needs of those in sector ministry and self-supporting ministry. It will be specifically designed for the diocese of Chichester. The bishops and archdeacons will also take part in it.
- 7.3 There will be a clergy conference in this quinquennium.

## **8. The Year of Holy Scripture: 2017**

In 2017 the diocese of Chichester will launch a Year of Holy Scripture. This will provide a range of resources that will enable existing Christians to undertake a health check on their knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

The Year of Holy Scripture will be an opportunity to explore its stories, famous characters, and the familiar phrases of the Bible; to put into historical context the books of the Old and the New Testaments, and to remind ourselves of the huge range of literary material they represent.

There will be a more detailed survey of the New Testament, with material that illustrates the gospels and their distinctive authors, the life and thought of the writers of the epistles, and the impact that they have had.

Most importantly, the Year of Holy Scripture will invite us to renew our appreciation of the Bible as revealing to us the mystery of God, the Holy Trinity, and the mission of love and salvation, the narrative that spans the history of creation.

The Year of Scripture is an invitation to renewal and rediscovery for all Christians in the diocese of Chichester. It is also intended as an introduction to the Bible for those who have never read it before – the greatest invitation we can offer.

## **9. Areas of contribution to the common good**

### **9.1 Education**

Only 59 Presentments explicitly identified school when responding to article 65, “What participation do people in your congregation have in the wider life of the local community?” This response is quite limited, given that we have 158 church schools, each needing skilled and committed foundation governors. We must ensure our best response to this invaluable opportunity.

Of course, the phrasing of the question might have led some people to look beyond the church’s own structures. It was very good to learn on my visits that in some parishes where there is no church school clergy and laity still play an important role in the local state school.

It is worth remembering that the Church of England took the lead in the movement towards the provision of free education, through the establishment of the National Society over 200 years ago. In terms of the scope of this contribution to the common good, it was rightly understood that education is a key with which to unlock the chains of deprivation.

Our commitment to education is also an investment in the process of nurture that gives a child access to their spiritual life and the Christian tradition as a vehicle for its exploration. At a purely cultural and educational level, this vehicle also delivers knowledge about a tradition that has been formative of our literature, art, music, architecture and theatre.

Schools, especially church schools, should form a bridge between our contribution to the common good and the worshipping life of a congregation in our household of faith.

### **9.2 Local Charities**

53 presentments mentioned local charities in which members of our congregations have a leading role. Among the important aspects of this contribution to the common good is support given freely to make possible a sustained and appropriate response to a local need.

One of the best examples of this is the Worthing Churches Homeless Projects. This initiative started in 1991 by taking hot soup and bedding to homeless people on the beach in Worthing. It now responds in different ways to 1000 people a year, and is supported by 200 volunteers.

Faith empowered those who saw a need and knew that their calling was to reveal the mercy of God in action.

### **9.3 Food Banks and Debt Counselling**

This response is widespread across the diocese. It reveals the reality that need exists in many different places, often most acute where least expected. Chichester food bank tells

that story. Rural deprivation hovers around the lives of many affluent parishes, and is often more difficult to address than the needs that emerge in urban areas.

#### **9.4 Family Support Work**

Because this charity has an historic link with the diocese, it is widely supported in at deanery and parish level. 2015 has FSW celebrate 125 years of delivery of support to families. Its history has required it to adapt to the changing needs of family life. Those needs are changing more rapidly than ever, as are the demands on those who seek to offer support.

The requirement to address change is a positive statement about ensuring that whatever our contribution to the common good might be, it must always begin with the needs that others identify, not our perception of what they need or deserve.

#### **9.5 Uniformed organisations**

This remains a significant element in the church's provision of facilities for young people. The benefits of these groupings lie in a strong sense of identity (the uniform), progression through childhood to young adulthood, and achievement of a sense of self-esteem by graded measures (collecting badges).

#### **9.6 The arts**

This important area had many different expression of interest in the presentments. Local arts festivals, many using church buildings, was the most common. But it also included the work of the church organist and other musicians, flower festivals, and the parish pantomime (a very distinctive art form!).

In terms of the wider contribution to the arts, many of our buildings represent in themselves a collection of important works of art that could rival the quality in some museums. The quality of some funerary monuments, wall paintings, textiles, woodwork, stained glass and metalwork is outstanding, and forms a discrete collection that narrates a slice of the nation's history.

#### **9.7 The environment**

In terms of the church's contribution to the built environment, our church buildings continue the theme of the common good expressed as a repository of history and collective memory. Evidence of this in an external context was given recently when the historian Tom Holland assessed the destruction by Isis of the temple of Bel in Palmyra. He spoke of it as a symbol of people who had "upheld different traditions [and] had nevertheless managed to come together and fashion something wondrous.

Assessing how we attend to the sustainability of our buildings, the contribution that they make to the skyline and character of village, town, and city, is now a matter for urgent



consideration. It cannot be simply for the benefit of a worshipping congregation; our vision must ensure that we first reach to heaven, but also make reference to the dimensions of history, past, present and future. Ensuring that buildings can be a benefit not a burden will require imagination, and clarity of purpose if termination of their use or existence is the right and best way forward.

The natural environment is also a dimension for which we bear considerable responsibility. The project that Miles King and Mark Betson worked on to produce *The Nature of God's Acre* makes an important statement about the church's commitment to the earth as a matter of theological principle. It also identifies, by way of a worked example, how in many of our churchyards the story of death and new life is uniquely demonstrated in sites that go back, in some cases, to Saxon times.

### **9.8 Civic, political, and economic life**

35 presentments mentioned a member of the congregation who has a leading role in public life. This is an important expression of the church's contribution to the common good and the outworking of what it means to be apostolic; sent to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of the world's affairs.

It is invariably lay women and men who speak for the Christian faith in forums where decisions are made that affect the lives of others. Encouraging and supporting those who undertake this ministry demands appropriate, particular, discreet and prayerful attention within the Christian community.

### **3. Conclusion: Drawing the Charge to a close**

In drawing this charge to its conclusion I am reminded of greater apostolic visitations than mine. At the centre of each of them is Jesus who travels with us in our joys and sorrows, on the road to heaven.

The missionary journeys of St Paul evoke that image. Throughout his letters he speaks of the strength he drew from the churches he visited (1 Thessalonians 2.19), his anguish for their trials (Romans 16.17-19) and the ways in which they could be damaged and weakened (1 Corinthians 5 – 8). And through all this, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ was emphatically characterised by joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice.” (Philippians 4.4-7).

Visitation and journeying similarly characterises the apostolic and evangelistic ministry of Wilfrid (634-709), who church planted a Christian presence in Sussex, in Selsey, and Richard de Wych (1197-1253), whose sanctity made so deep and abiding an impression on the life of this household that his attention to Jesus Christ is summed up in a prayer we still use.

In a more contemporary setting, however, the challenges of living and communicating the gospel were examined in detail by a remarkable group of lay and ordained Christians, led by Richard O’Brien. Their brief in the early 1980s was to visit the urban areas of Britain and to assess the impact of deprivation.

Britain is a very different place today. Deprivation has not been eliminated. It is more subtle, but no less pernicious. It breaks out across the social and economic spectrum, in which differences between rich and poor are wider than ever. The fruit is its detriment to human flourishing and to a capacity for faith in Jesus Christ.

Richard O’Brien’s commission concluded their report with an affirmation that I think is worth quoting. It says something fundamental about the nature of our life in Christ in its many different forms and circumstances. It certainly evokes my own experience of searching out, and sharing in, the faith of the congregations in the churches of this diocese.

“Somewhere along the road which we have travelled in the past two years each of us has faced a personal challenge to our lives and life styles: a call to change our thinking and action in such a way as to help us to stand more closely alongside the risen Christ with those who are poor and powerless. We have found faith in the city.”<sup>1</sup>

My prayer and hope is that wherever we encounter poverty and powerlessness, in rural and in urban Sussex, in whatever form it might appear, we shall determine to respond with the liberating power of the love of God.

“For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4.5-6)

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

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<sup>1</sup> *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation*, Church House Publishing (1985)