

Notes of the Tower Hamlets Deanery Synod Meeting – 5 February 2018

7.30pm at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine

Attended by 8 clergy and 21 laity

Those present went outside to pray God's blessing on the new retreat rooms and then moved to the Queen Elizabeth Room, where Jane Hodges led evening prayer.

Welcome

Andy Rider opened the meeting and welcomed those present. Andy announced that Kevin Scully and Debbie Frazer were stepping down. Kevin is moving to become Warden at the College of St Barnabas in Surrey and Debbie is taking early retirement. Andy asked us to pray for their parishes.

Andy reported that Crossroads Counselling is seeking new board members and would welcome an Anglican presence. There is 10k run on 15th July to fundraise for the charity and there are six free places available for anyone who wishes to take part.

Andy has a surplus of Songs of Fellowship books at Christ Church, which are free if you wish to collect.

The theme of the evening was 'Vocation and Ministry'. Andy had preached five sermons on this theme a few years ago and they have been published in booklet form entitled 'Discover Your Next Step'. Copies were available that evening or those interested can contact Andy.

Before handing over to Brian Ralph to chair the rest of the meeting Andy welcomed Christopher Ramsay, a leading figure in finding new ordinands for the church.

Presentation by Rev Christopher Ramsay

Christopher spoke about the multi-ethnic parish of St Georges Southall where he has been parish priest for 17 years. Christopher is also a DDO (Diocesan Director of Ordinands) and recently organised a day conference for the London clergy about the vocation to ordination, entitled '[Calling London](#)'. He spoke about different ways people are moved on hearing God's call: the heroic lone minister with lots of strengths but also lots of weaknesses; the team ministry where a few people do all the work. However, another model is sought, where every baptised person spreads the Word through doing ministry and that some of those become ordained. Christopher wanted us to hear from some of those that have been moved to action.

Testaments by New Recruits

Lizzie Campbell is in her second year of an internship at St Nics, Poplar. She had studied Physics and had the calling through music, being in a choir at university. She moved to London to take up a job as a programmer and began attending church. She worked in youth ministry and then, at a young women's event in Coventry, things began to make sense. Leading from the centre of a community seemed possible. She took up the Stepney internship and learnt preaching and musical ministry. She is attending St Mellitus to study Theology once a week.

Ben Bell and Tim May took the floor together. Ben is a curate in Poplar. He began doing youth work in a church in Islington where it was suggested he consider ordination. Twice he worked with DDOs but felt his calling was with people outside the four walls of the church. He eventually studied a Masters in Youth Ministry and was captured by sacramental theology. He was heavily influenced by Rowan Williams and enjoyed his writings on vocation. Maybe God was calling! Ben still felt that he did not fit in church but was sure God calls us to be ourselves, so there are many different ways to serve.

Tim is based at St Peter's Bethnal Green and is leading on planting a new local church. His father was a vicar and told of how, at six years old, he would sit with his father with a sense of God speaking to him. It seemed plausible to grow up and do what his father did. He worked with a DDO at 21 years old but had lost and found his faith many times. He felt inner tensions between how the world works and how the church works and was confused by the differences between his church friends and other friends motivated by career and money. Finally, he met Bishop Paul who sensed his vision and told him it could be done within the Church of England. Having been a wayward teenager (he had been expelled from school), he felt he was finally given full space to be himself. They climbed a scaffold together and prayed!

Christopher thanked Lizzie, Ben and Tim. Those present were asked to get into pairs and consider what the following passages say to us about vocation:

Corinthians 12: 12-31

John 21: 15-17

Ephesians 4: 7-13

Matthew 9: 9-13

There was a chance for us to discuss our findings. Christopher then showed a [video of people in training for ordination](#) and how their particular journeys began. We were asked to consider how we nurture these people and what role their vicars and people around them played.

We viewed some slides showing the number of candidates being recommended for ordination. The peak was in the mid-60s when around 700 a year were put forward. At the moment the figure is down to around 500 a year and so numbers need to rise just to stand still. Christopher went on to explain that the Diocese of London is very focussed and is producing lots of ordinands, despite middling attendance rates. However, diversity is always an issue. There are still less women and those of ethnic origin. The percentage of ordinands in London without a degree is 12%, versus the national average of 26%.

Those present were asked to form groups and spend a few minutes considering the following questions:

- What can we do in my church to nurture people to be ordained?
- What can we do to nurture the full diversity of God's people to be ordained?

Christopher offered some actions:

- Pray – have a look at the [‘Asking the Lord’](#) leaflet.
- Start young – involve young people.
- Nurture everyone’s vocation – offer/signpost courses.
- Offer different models of priesthood.
- Do something in your own worship – perhaps a Vocation Sunday.
- Have a PCC discussion – brainstorm ideas.
- Tell others what you see in them.

Christopher left us with the image of the [Raising of Lazarus by Duccio](#) and asked what we see in the painting in terms of vocation. Christopher saw the unbinding of a person’s talents and also the scepticism of bystanders and asked us to think about the resurrection being not for the church but for the glory of God.

Conclusion

Brian thanked Christopher for an insightful talk. Brian spoke briefly about his own journey and asked us to remember that the calling can be challenging and, at times, lonely and frustrating. Those we identify must not just be good leaders but also have the capacity for thoughtful prayer and strength in silence.

Closing prayers were led by Jane Hodges.

Elizabeth Marshall took the floor to thank Philip Rice for his hard work in raising the profile of betting terminals and it is hoped a change in the law may come about due to these efforts.

Elizabeth also reported that she is carrying out work for the Diocese looking at operational resources across parishes. In order to get a feel for what support is needed she would like to circulate some questions. Please look out for these and all responses will be gratefully received.

Grace was said and the meeting concluded at 9pm.

Forthcoming Meetings:

Thursday 24 May 2018 – Common Fund Meeting at St Peter’s Bethnal Green

Monday 9 July 2018 - Summer Synod and BBQ at St Luke’s Millwall