

Notes of the Deanery Synod – 25 March 2019

7.30pm at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine

Attended by 10 clergy and 18 laity

1. Welcome

Prayer was led by Erin Clark and Jane Preston read Hebrews 2:5-18.

Andy Rider welcomed those attending. Attendees were given a handout, 'Discerning our 2030 Vision', outlining Bishop Sarah's request to start thinking creatively about the way forward for ministry and mission in London. Pairs were formed to consider the two main questions being asked, namely, how have we seen God working in London over the last five years and what do you think God is calling the church in London to be in the next ten years? We are being encouraged to hold planned conversations about this in our parishes between now and July and to feed responses back to 2030.vision@london.anglican.org.

The following school governor appointments were ratified:

Governor	School	Proposed by
Carrie Bishop	Christ Church Primary School	Andy Rider
Bob Gilbert	St Paul with St Luke Primary School	Nichola Horton (Headteacher)
Rachel Clapham	St Paul with St Luke Primary School	Ed Dix

Andy reminded parishes that Deanery subscriptions are due for 2019. Dawn will be contacting everyone.

2. Poverty and Our Parishes

Brian Ralph stood to introduce two speakers - Alastair Murray and Bethan Lant. Alastair spent more than twenty years working in housing and homelessness services and was a founding staff member at [Housing Justice](#) following its amalgamation with UNLEASH. He is now semi-retired and worships at Bethnal Green Mission Church. Bethan is a case worker and training manager at Praxis, an organisation influential in uncovering the recent Windrush scandal. She is a human rights professional experienced in migration, criminal justice and gender. She is the co-Chair of TELCO, the East London arms of [Citizens UK](#).

Brian spoke about the changing communities in Tower Hamlets and the poverty and need that are still present. We were reminded of the legacy of Ken Leech and the work of Brother Neville Palmer and how these individuals reflected the nature of the church at that time.

Alastair Murray

Alastair opened with a quote from R H Tawney in 1913, '*What thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty, thoughtful poor people call with equal justice the problem of riches.*' Alastair went on to talk about the Tower Hamlets Fairness Commission which was set up by the Mayor of Tower Hamlets and chaired by Giles Frazer to tackle inequality in the borough. The Commission found that nowhere in the country was inequality more pronounced. In 2015 the average salary in the borough was £61,000, the second highest after the City of London. The economy of Tower Hamlets is worth more than £6 billion and yet the borough has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country.

Back in the 1840's, London Labour and the London Poor Maps by Henry Mayhew shone a light on poverty, but there are remarkable similarities in these stories to today's world. Many activists of the Victorian period were named – Booth; Shaftsbury; the Quaker Annie MacPherson.

In 1974 the difference between rich and poor was probably at its smallest, thanks in most part to the unions, even though this was the 'Winter of Discontent'. Most people could own a home, run a car and have a foreign holiday. However, since the seventies, Tory governments have overseen the privatisation of the railways, utilities and, significantly, housing. Most housing stock is now let out to private rents. Currently, according to the Tower Hamlets website, 39% of households are in private rented accommodation, with 23% owner occupiers and 36% in social housing. There are lots of waiting lists for social housing and 4 in 10 leasers live in statutorily overcrowded conditions.

Alastair quoted the current price on Right Move of a bedsit/studio flat at between £190k and £210k, whereas a council flat would cost £100 per week. Alastair questioned whether house price inflation was a good or bad thing. Certainly, in the media, a buoyant market is considered a good thing. We were reminded that council housing pays for itself without the need for public subsidy.

In conclusion, Alastair felt that for any change to come about, we must start with a collective vision and take action in our own neighbourhood as well as at national level.

Bethan Lant – Project Lead at Praxis Community Projects

Bethan talked us through the difficulties facing asylum seekers and migrants and the inherent unfairness in the system.

Asylum seekers have no entitlement to benefits, housing or work. Housing is provided by the Home Office, together with a weekly allowance of £35 per person per week. Bethan is campaigning to give them the right to work but it is viewed by the Home Office as an attraction that would pull more people to this country. This is not evidence based, just ideology.

Once refugee status has been granted, they are moved on by the Home Office into social housing. If they are single, they join long waiting lists for housing. They will become homeless unless they have a support network in the migrant community and can sofa surf. Although they are now allowed to work, they have no address, no experience, no references and often little English. They turn to the benefits system and are often, unsurprisingly, suffering stress and anxiety issues.

Many are refused refugee status. Many are genuine cases that are unable to convince the Home Office of their situation. They immediately lose their home and the £35 a week. The policy is to make them destitute to force them back home. But many are but are too scared to go back home where they may be returning to dangerous situations. There is no other support for these people. Legal Aid is very difficult to get and solicitors that take this work on are overloaded.

Apart from asylum seekers, there are also migrants that come from poor countries with the hope of working and bettering themselves. Often, they have a British child, ie a child by a British man who then deserts them. The application fee for settled status is £1,033, plus a health surcharge of £1,000. No Legal Aid is available. This allows them permission to stay for 30 months. Overall the pathway to settlement takes ten years and every extension has to be paid for again. The final charge at the end of the process for definite leave to remain is £2,389 per person. The *actual* administrative cost is just £243, so the final charge is ten times the actual cost.

A condition of settlement is that they are not living on public funds but, with no welfare and no social housing, they often end up with huge amounts of debt. Bethan views the system as endemically unjust and deliberate government policy to embed impoverishment. The long-term costs are huge. Children,

often British themselves, are told they are different because their mother is foreign. This alienation has social costs, which are far-reaching.

Q&A

Brian thanked the speakers and opened up to the floor for questions and comments.

- Should we ask different questions of our politicians and what is the role of the church in this regard? How do we get our Bishops to engage?
A. The Deanery sent a letter to the Bishops who sit in the House of Lords last year on the subject of housing. Perhaps it would be timely to draft another letter to the Lords?
- Church members are called to be political (not *party* political).
- There has been a rise in fees across all official bodies, both in local and central government. These functions should be funded from taxes not individuals. Why haven't the politicians challenged this?
- You now need a passport to get a job or rent a flat. This is new and has introduced a system of 'internal bordering'. This creates a cost barrier and a bureaucratic barrier for the poorest people.
- Is this bureaucratic minefield a product of austerity, incompetence or intelligent design?
- There are sometimes warrants issued to clear beggars from the streets. What can we do as churches to help these people? It was agreed that policy is wrong and that the housing crisis is the background to this. In the meantime, if you have concerns about individuals, log them with [StreetLink](#). [GrowTH](#) is another amazing initiative that could help.

3. Conclusion

Andy Rider suggested that the Standing Committee when they meet will consider how we might respond perhaps by writing to the Lords Spiritual regarding the issues discussed.
Andy then thanked the speakers and those present for a great discussion.

Andy closed the meeting with prayer.

[Next Meeting: Thursday 4 July 2019](#)

7.30pm Spitalfields Rectory - 'Creative'