

Visitation Charge 2018

If we were looking for a translation into understandable English, of the title of the book of the Old Testament from which our first lesson was taken, I think we might come up with something like 'Constitutional Reform.' Deuteronomy is a fascinating book that shows us just how interesting Constitutional reform can be. It shows us the potential of what might just be regarded as boring admin. It might look like long lists of regulations but there are lots of very radical ideas embedded in them. For instance it is in this book that for the first time we learn that we can have butchers, who are not priests. We learn that there are to be special cities designated as cities of sanctuary where people who have killed someone else by accident can live safely without the threat of vengeance by the dead person's family. We see that rape is taken as seriously as murder, especially if it happens in the countryside where no-one might hear a cry for help. It's all very practical and interesting because of that. We also find there directions for how much wine will make festivals go with a real swing (there are parishes of my acquaintance where that advice is unnecessary) and directions as to how to prepare for battle (unfortunately from time to time there are parishes where those instructions are also unnecessary). What Deuteronomy presents us with, and what makes it such a fascinating book, is a picture of a religious community's self-understanding, and that is what we ought to be able to read in any Constitution.

Our second reading today presents the Church's self-understanding in a different idiom. 1 Peter describes the Church as living stones, a holy priesthood built into a spiritual house to offer spiritual sacrifices. That's the reading on which our final hymn is based, and it paints a rather more accessible picture of who we think we are. This Visitation charge will, I hope, draw on both traditions. By necessity we have to deal with some of the structural and mundane elements of our life, but I hope we may also hear things that will encourage and perhaps even inspire us in our discipleship, help us to consider who we are, and simply being together in this context is a good start.

It is good to see you all here and thank you for coming. I describe this as a meeting of those who make church happen and that is a much larger group than clergy and wardens. It includes cleaners, pew sheet printers, welcomers, sidespeople, choirs, organists, collection counters, flower arrangers, sacristans, intercessors, servers, crucifers, readers, tea and coffee makers – and that's only on Sundays. On behalf of Bishop Michael and myself, thank you all. Thank you also to those who have made cakes and prepared to make a special contribution to the service today. Thank you to the Dean for allowing us to meet here. Today we can welcome two new clergy members to our Island family. Andrew and Anne Mayes have now moved to Limassol. As well as being Chaplain in Limassol, his first priority, Andrew will be Diocesan Spirituality Advisor.

This role will mean that he is a member of the Barnabas Team in the Diocese. Much of the development of that team was accomplished when Canon Paul Maybury was Spirituality Adviser, but there has been further development since he left, and Andrew's role will differ from his. In the first place he will be an adviser, a wisdom-bringer, and that is a role he is well placed to play with considerable experience in the field, and publications and video evidence of very effective work. One area of specific skill is that of Spiritual guidance and direction. Not only has he acted as a guide himself, but he has also trained others to be guides, and that points to one kind of contribution he will make to the team. What he will not be is

an executive officer, alone determining the direction and strategy of the team. Under the chairmanship of Sarel du Plessis, that team has grown in confidence and has made ministry-enhancing contributions to Diocesan life of which many can bear witness.

Navina Thompson is our new Curate and Student Chaplain in Ammochostos. We have congratulated Brian Elliott on being granted a canonry in this cathedral, and it is good to see the Senior Chaplain to the Forces, Matt, here, following the excellent example of participation set by his predecessor Peter. In July we shall gather here for the Ordination of Justin Arnott, who will serve his Curacy at the cathedral where Kent Middleton made such a positive contribution, and of Peter Day who will be licensed as non-stipendiary Curate in Ammochostos. We have lost Kent and Douglas who both served here during the year with distinction. Our loss is the Gulf's gain.

In the office Anetta has greatly reduced her hours (apparently). Anetta simply cannot help wanting to help and she is someone who really does hold the Diocese dearly in her heart. We have been joined by Dr Helen Perry who has very quickly endeared herself to all who've worked alongside her. She has brought a raft of gifts and accomplishments and that most precious commodity, enthusiasm, to her job of Administrative Officer. They are working alongside Evangelia who has been a help to many of you, and Georgia who carries her heavy load of responsibilities to the Bishop and the Province on broad shoulders and is always willing to go the extra mile. We are indeed fortunate to be supported by such a staff

On the theme of ministry, there have been several developments during the year, at a Diocesan level. Our Exploring Faith course has now been fully regularised by Queens College Newfoundland, and we shall have our first Graduation ceremony for Chris Goldsmith and Geoff Graham here on June 11th. Groups continue to meet in Limassol, but we certainly have potential to increase them in Cyprus. They are increasing at a rate in the rest of the Diocese and proving to be both a good tool for discernment and a viable means of training for a variety of ministries. And when I say, discernment, I do not mean trying to find out if God is calling us to something. Rather I mean trying to find out what it is that God is calling us to, because we are all called to be and do something. We licensed two new Readers in December, Ray Elliott and Kevin Moore, and we certainly have potential for more. It is not too long since the area now covered by the parish of Ammochostos was served by just one priest. Now it will have one priest, two Deacons and a Reader. And that team will be able to pioneer new ministries and do exciting new things. I have been particularly excited, for example, to hear about the development of a prison visiting ministry there, (and work done on the ecumenical front is an example to all of us).

The Diocese has now decided that in order to give parishes more of a sense of cooperation and partnership in ministerial training, any parish that sponsors someone who is subsequently recommended for training for ministry, should make a contribution of €500, half of which will be given as a book grant and half of which will go to the library fund. Vocations to all ministries, lay and ordained, will henceforth be tested by a Bishop's Advisory Panel in the context of a residential selection conference. One will be held later this year and it would be good to think that there may be people on the island who could be present at that. Last year a new tranche of selectors attended residential training here in Cyprus, and we look forward to their contribution.

The Island Theological Library is now being established here in the Diocesan Office. We already have several hundred books, many of them thanks to a generous donation of books from the library of the late Lew Scudder. These include many standard works, difficult to access elsewhere. Alongside them we

have a wide range of texts related to the courses run on the Island. Anyone may borrow these books, and the library is open whenever the office is open. A system for organizing lending is being put in place. These are all theological books. If you want John Grisham or Jilly Cooper you need to come to the monthly St Helena's book sale. (Other book sales are available)

Later in the year we are holding a residential training session for facilitators. I shall be interested to hear from anyone who thinks they could perform that role. Facilitators are not specialist teachers. They have a different role, and I am sure that the professional life of many people in our churches would equip them for that. The main qualification is that facilitators have a definite sense of being called as disciples, and that they have maintained their own sense of theological curiosity.

One further Ministry matter: it seems likely now that the delayed Clergy and Spouses Conference will take place next May in Jordan. Can I remind parishes that this is an event for which they have to budget. The conference costs are met by the Province but the travel costs for clergy and spouses are met by the parishes.

Moving on to something rather more Deuteronomy than 1 Peter, a persistent problem here has been the question of how parishes might have a legal identity on the island. A few years ago that was a problem for the Diocese as a whole, but that has now been resolved with the formation of the Anglican Church (Cyprus) Ltd as a not for profit company. The problem persists with individual parishes. There is difficulty in opening bank accounts, signing leases, owning movable property such as cars, and indeed in every interface between the church and the civil authorities. Over the past few months we have been looking at a range of options to remedy this situation and now we have a solution. This will affect the parishes of Ammochostos, Larnaca, Limassol and Paphos. The cathedral has made its own arrangements by registering as a Charity. But for those four parishes, each will be able to form an "Association." The process involves first, putting together a so-called Memorandum that fits a template set by the authorities. These memoranda will be similar to existing parish constitutions and will exist alongside them. They will not replace them. They will contain information that presently constitutions do not contain, such as how money is to be raised. Each Association Memorandum will be signed by twenty members. These will be counted as 'founder members' and there will be no further reference to them. A once for all fee is paid (€300 at present) and then each Association will be able to do all the things that presently they cannot.

The Constitutions of the four parishes are currently with our lawyer, who is advising about what additions need to be made in order for them to conform to the template. Parishes will be kept in touch. It is most efficient if the applications are made together because then we only have one set of legal costs. The good news is that the legal costs will be borne by the Diocese. The one-off fee will be payable by the parishes. There will be no need to present accounts or report in other ways to outside bodies, or to make any kind of annual reapplication and there is no inspection process. The whole process should be complete within a year and I trust that will be welcomed by everyone. In Kyrenia such an association already exists, and during the coming year I expect there to be developments that will clarify and ratify its role.

The Diocesan Constitution process has moved on during the year. A draft was sent to parishes for comment, and comments were scrutinized by a select committee of Standing Committee who received its report and unanimously proposed the draft to Synod. However it became clear there that some parishes in the Gulf had not felt they had sufficient time fully to deal with the issues it raised for them

and the debate was adjourned. I appreciate the frustrations of those who had participated fully in the process and were anxious to proceed, so that their own parish constitutions could be signed off. Going forward, a new opportunity has been given to those parishes that needed more time, with submissions having been required by the end of April. In addition there will be a series of road shows on behalf of Standing Committee, in the Autumn, in the Gulf, to provide the kind of conversation some Gulf parishes clearly wanted. Our own Cyprus Forum will provide a similar opportunity here. Synod is simply not designed for a lengthy debate on controversial issues, at least not in its present form, and it is hoped that some measure of agreement can be reached on a form of the Constitution that can be presented at Synod next year.

I have already mentioned the Barnabas Team and I hope that parishes are making use of the valuable work they have been doing in making Synod discussion material available to parishes. Their work on the Intentional Discipleship discussions at Synod 2017 is now available and a very useful introduction to any parish discussion on strategy in this area. The Barnabas Team were also responsible for finding our Lent course this year and I have heard many good reports about it from five of our churches that used it. They are also collating the work done at Synod this year on Doing God and Doing Good and we look forward to seeing that in due course. The film presented at Synod on the work of Katafiyio and particularly the work involved in being a caretaker there, was one of the highlights of the meeting. We are currently looking for replacement caretakers from the end of this year. The Spirituality Days have provided a very varied menu and have been much appreciated by a growing constituency. The team is in good heart and looking forward to Andrew's joining it.

The obvious thought that went into the reports from the groups at Synod this year on the relationship between doing God and doing good, and the obvious energy and innovative creativity evidenced there, augurs well. In a context where most of our churches are suffering from people leaving the island and where there is some concern about congregations growing older, one good way to allow people to touch the hem of the church's garment is to be obviously and intentionally involved in doing good. Many people will bear witness to the importance of meeting new people when the Church is involved with community projects, soup runs, street pastors, charity shops, food banks, hospital visiting teams and so on. In this context, our second Social Outreach Forum has established that event as an annual necessity.

The other opportunities we have created for day conferences on the Island, bringing together people involved with particular roles have continued to prove popular. The Community of Cyprus Treasurers meets most often and is a model of what such a group should be and do. We shall be continuing this year with the Forum in the Autumn, building on the new format we pioneered last year, also with the meetings for Wardens, Secretaries and Communications Officers. It has been particularly pleasing to see standards rise with regard to communication, and even more, to see the enthusiasm that has accompanied that. The Diocesan website is experienced by many as a nightmare, but we are really trying hard to make it a better experience. The whole process of setting it up has been beset with bugs, accidental dumps and other technical obstacles. The extent to which we have any control over the process has been limited by the fact that it has been done pro bono by a great friend and supporter of the Diocese. The task of adapting the site as it now stands to suit our needs best, and to write new material for it, was addressed at a meeting of the Communications Team this week, and I have every confidence that we shall see welcome changes and developments soon.

This year we are adding one more day conference to our collection. Soon we shall be inviting all involved in the wedding ministry to a day at which we can discuss a number of things. Mrs Pat Baulch is now our Island weddings coordinator, and we need to explain her role to everyone concerned. Few people have her expertise and it will be a great relief to many to see her at the helm. I cannot stress too much the importance of getting the administrative aspects of weddings correct. When mistakes occur they cause great distress to the couples concerned and, through the publicity generated, damage the reputation of the church and its wedding ministry as a whole. It is often because we have failed to regard administration as a pastoral task that this happens, and that is a point with more general application. The meeting will give opportunity to make sure that everyone knows exactly what is required by the law in terms of administration. However there are other issues. New EU legislation is leading to the digitization of processes that presently are carried out in a different way. This will affect us directly and everyone needs to know what is going on. More generally, there is a feeling that this ministry is not being promoted enough or at least not effectively enough. The number of weddings we have celebrated has slumped dramatically over the last few years and we need to see why that is and if there is anything we can do together to remedy it.

We need not think of occasions that bring members of our churches together, only in terms of these functions. The success of our Spirituality Days, for example, has proved that. Recently I had an interesting letter from the Diocesan President of the Mothers Union in the Diocese of Europe. She was wondering whether there might be any interest in having a Mothers Union presence of some kind on the Island, and I wonder that too. The Bishop is kindly inclined toward the suggestion if there is support for it. I know there are lots of anecdotal but warmly meant stories about the Mothers Union. I have sometimes felt, when faced with something like a Mothers Union mass gathering of some kind, rather like the General at Waterloo who having surveyed his troops is said to have remarked: "I don't know what they do to the enemy but by God they terrify me." Or again, the apocryphal story about the priest invited to address a Mothers Union Meeting in the Isle of Wight and who thought he would show his mastery of modern informal greeting at mass events, with the words "Well hello Cowes." These are warmly meant and need to be seen against the backdrop of, for example, the work done by the Mothers Union in our link Diocese of Thika, who are at the forefront of health education and local health care as well as having a key role in the development of church life and spirituality. Many from the UK will have experience of, and admiration for, their so-called Indoor Members ministry for the housebound and non-ambulant.

I expect there are many people on the Island who have at some time been members of the Mothers Union, an earlier example of trying to do God and do good, and it may be that there is an appetite for an official presence here. Perhaps we could test that with an Island-wide event later in the year to be held where it seemed there might be the most support. If you think that's a good idea, have a word with your Chaplain, and let's see where that takes us. On the subject of correspondence, can I also mention the Friends of the Diocese whose Chair is Canon Ian Calder, known to many of you. The Friends are always looking for new members both here and in the UK and also for contributions to the Olive Branch magazine which is being published twice a year. I, your Chaplain or the Office staff will be pleased to put you in touch.

We have welcomed a new Trustee, Stuart Hillard to JEMT. Together with the observers, we now have meetings at which every church on the Island is represented, and that is good. Congratulations to all those concerned with the fabric of our buildings. The Quinquennial survey provided evidence of your

hard work, and our buildings are now in a very good state. JEMT (UK) is continuing in its efforts to have a legal identity in its own right in northern Cyprus, and much of our attention has been focused there. The new ramp at St George's Troodos has made it easier for everyone to access the church. Much good work has been done at the Parsonage in Limassol, and a new project is planned to provide disabled toilet facilities in Larnaca. I reflect that stewardship is indivisible. Showing careful stewardship of buildings is so often related to wider stewardship responsibility. In that context it is good to note the stewardship campaigns that have been continuing this year, and to see their success.

One area that I shall be contacting parishes about in the near future is data protection. This month, the General Data Protection Regulations approved by the EU in 2016 come into force. As you will be aware, there has been a heightening of awareness around data protection, prompted in part by the activities of social media hosts, but more generally, responding to the ways in which data is received and kept nowadays. This the first update for 20 years. The Church of England has produced a useful guide for parishes, including a checklist that Councils will find useful, and a parish data audit template which sets out the steps that need to be taken. I shall direct parishes to those resources and ask for confirmation that all necessary processes have been observed.

I was asked recently if I might say something in this Charge about the value of Synod. The point arose in a context where in one parish at least, questions were being raised about that. The plain question was put to me, that in a situation where budgets are tight and financial futures uncertain: is the Synod value for money?

If by that question is meant: do we spend the fees wisely; do we try to get the very best facilities for such a gathering at the best possible price, then I believe the answer is, yes, we do. If the question is: is the time spent by our staff on this event proportionate, then again I can say with absolute certainty, yes it is. We have a very dedicated staff who put in many extra hours to ensure the event's success, and I think most people appreciate that. But if I were to be expected to say more than that, I'm not sure where I'd start to be honest.

I might begin by reflecting on what makes churchgoing itself worthwhile. How do we judge whether that is worth it? Is it the care that has been taken in the preparation, organisation and delivery of services for example? Is it in the quality of the sermon or the content of the prayers? I think a box ticking exercise of that kind is possible but doesn't come close to answering a question about worthwhileness. Those are questions about how we are moved, perhaps even moved to reconsider a lifestyle, contemplate a change, open ourselves to new possibility, find hope when we thought there was none, find some kind of connectedness for the broken fragments of our lives, discover a place where the clouds really do part, a place of safety, sanctuary and caring. They are related to questions around how we experience a community that is prepared to forgive, to welcome, to thank, to embrace, to believe in redemption, to be passionate about doing good, and see all that as part of doing God.

For its supporters, Synod is an experience of such a description of Church at its best. And this Diocesan Synod is a fantastic living example of the kind of boundary-crossing inclusiveness that other dioceses and provinces can only speak about from a distance. It is a living example of the value of diversity and the kind of unity it can engender. It is a challenging interface with new ideas, new expressions in liturgy and worship, new horizons imagined by Christians in a significant place in the world at a significant time in history. My own congregation may tell you that I have likened it to a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

People leave it, inspired, motivated, enlightened and simply glad to have been part of it, and I am sure I speak for many if not most in this congregation when I say that. So, is it value for money?

There's an advert for credit cards that describes some things as priceless and then has the tag line "for everything else there's Mastercard." I think we mustn't ignore that division. Most basic of all is the question with which we began about how we think of ourselves. Are we customers and consumers of church. Are we those customers who are always right and are ever-ready to adopt a victim mentality when things do not go our way? Are we those customers who think our rights are supreme? Of course not – and yet that is where the question, 'is Synod value for money' actually leads us. Rather we are servants, members of a body, fellow-Christians, disciples learning together about what it is to be truly human, and what the image of God looks like in our lives. We are living stones

In fact, I am hugely encouraged by the feedback forms we get from participants at Synod. Some describe the event in almost life-changing ways, and certainly life-enhancing ways. I would say in answer to the question: for them it is worth it. For them it is beyond good value. It is one of the key ways in which we express and experience our identity. I, like many of you I'm sure, look forward to next year's Synod when our theme will be 'Five Marks of Liturgy,' relating all that we've done on the Five Marks of Mission to our worshipping life. And that I suppose brings us back again to 1 Peter where this spiritual house of living stones and of which we are part, is created to offer spiritual worship.

I would like to think that this afternoon has been 'worth it.' I certainly think so. Once again, thank you for coming and participating so whole-heartedly, and in this coming year in the life of our Archdeaconry and Diocese, may God bless you richly in all that you attempt in his name.

Amen