

**Minutes of a Meeting of the
Combined PCCs for Harwell and Chilton**

held on Tuesday 4th November 2008 at 7.45pm in All Saints' Church Chilton

Present

Chris Stott (Chair)

Harwell

Kate Evans

Allan Macarthur

Frances Taylor

Sid Gale

Tim Roberts

Jane Woolley

Clive House

Martin Speed (Co-opted
Secretary) - minutes

Tony Hughes

Chilton

Avril Butler (Co-opted
Secretary)

Linda Lambon

Pam Rolls

Naomi Gibson

Liz Morris

Andrew Hayes

Jeff Nesbitt

1. Opening

Chris opened the meeting with a reading from 1 Corinthians 4 and then led the meeting in prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from, John Berry, Stuart Gibson, Georgina Greer, Hazel King, Vicky Macarthur, Carol Pigott, John Pigott, and Steve Tunstall.

3. Whither the Church of England

Norman Russell, the Archdeacon of Berkshire, gave the PCC a talk outlining his views on the current divisions within the Church of England.

In broad summary the points he made in his prepared talk and in response to questions from the two PCCs were these:

- The current issues need to be seen in the context of a century of tremendous change. For example Sunday school attendance has dropped from 60% of children to around 2%. The 'hinterland' of Christian knowledge has shrunk since the 70's – for example, then everyone at a marriage ceremony would at least know the Lord's prayer but that is something that could not be expected now.
- Increasingly the culture has moved from broadly Christian standards to new viewpoints, some of which are hostile to the Church of England.

- Against this background the Church of England has its basis in the main stream of the Western Christian Church, reformed in the 16th century, and established on (as in the 'declaration of assent' made by all clergy) the Bible, the creeds, 39 Articles of Faith, and the book of common prayer. Holy Scripture is seen as paramount and as holding all 'requisite to salvation.'
- The hub of the problem is the question of authority. Although based on scripture and their interpretation as expressed in the creeds, there is also authority in the tradition of the Church. Tradition acts as a counterbalance to new interpretations of scripture that have not been fully thought through.
- Reason can be 'slippery' because of cultural interpretations. Paul says we need to be 'transformed' in order to discern what scripture means – showing that uninformed reason is not sufficient basis for authority. (While the Roman Catholic Church places much emphasis on the role of individual conscience, this is 'well informed' conscience.)
- In the 16th Century the divisions could be seen as being between Scripture and tradition. The big divisions now are between 'liberal' and 'conservative' views. The liberal view Norman portrayed as being a 'demanding' politically correct approach associated with the decision that all adoption agencies (including the Roman Catholic ones) must consider same sex couples. The conservative view Norman portrayed as remaining guided by scripture. (Roman Catholic conservatives were, he said, more guided by tradition than scripture, but tradition came very close to scripture.)
- The debate about Homosexuality Norman sees as a front for a contest between Scripture and culture.
- There is a sense that all groups look to Scripture, but he felt that this is not in the same ways:
 - liberals he sees as more shaped by culture, but look to Scripture for inspiration.
 - conservatives shaped by Scripture but recognise that they have to deal with the culture.
- Norman was asked to amplify this issue of engagement and he considered as examples of ways of dealing with a hostile culture the Jews in exile in Babylon – who successfully held onto their faith but contributed to the culture they were in – and the separatist sects in the time of Jesus – who kept their faith strong, but were less effective because they were cut off from society.
- The big challenge is how we live *in* the world but not be *of* the world. Drawing a parallel with the Benedictine communities that kept faith alive after the end of the Roman Empire, Norman suggested Christian communities today need to focus more closely on their study of the scriptures.
- The question of the ordination of women was raised by a PCC member. Norman said that many would agree that the interpretation of Scripture tended to support the ordination of women, in a way that was not comparable to the view of homosexuality in the scriptures (where he said it was nowhere seen as acceptable.) He said culture sometimes poses questions that we can't avoid. In these cases we have to go back to Scripture, and sometimes when asking new questions of Scripture it provides some new answers.
- A PCC member asked whether scientific discoveries (such as possibly finding an incontrovertible biological basis for homosexuality) would affect interpretations of Scripture. Norman said that this would happen – yes, of course scientific discoveries

would provide challenges, as had happened with the response of the Church to Darwin. He referred everyone to John Lennox's book about science and faith¹.

- The Anglican Communion has been in disarray: with much of this coming from the American church. They have moved in the direction of liberalism and Norman describes this as a move away from Scripture. This has resulted in churches there and in Canada moving out of their 'liberal' dioceses, and wanting a parallel organisation that retained traditional values. Norman portrayed these liberal views as also including, in some circles, a view that Jesus was not really God, and rejecting the Incarnation and Resurrection. He portrayed them as moving towards Hinduism and Buddhism. (The comment was made by a PCC member that surely these views would be far more divisive than issues of sexuality and Norman agreed that the Resurrection has always been seen as turning the world upside down – as physically represented in a 4th Century Church in Milan which incorporates a Pagan temple column built into the fabric of the church upside down.)
- Asked about the church in Africa, Norman explained that it was generally large and growing, with the largest Anglican Church worldwide being in Nigeria. The response of African Church leaders has been mainly conservative with Africa taking a lead in saying that the liberalism cannot go on.
- Similar things might happen in this country, but this would be a shame because of the historic relationship between the Church of England and this land – something shown by the way people flock to churches in the event of disasters.

Chris led the meeting in thanking Norman very much for his visit and informative talk.

4. Church Administrator

Chris reported that, as included in the Team Time meeting notes that were circulated before the meeting, Naomi was to give up her post as Church Administrator at the start of January.

Chris led the meeting in saying a very big thank you to her for over six years' work in the role – the acknowledged that this left us greatly in her debt for all that she has done.

Chris said that proposals to address this challenge and opportunity were outlined in the Team Time meeting notes. As the issues affected both PCCs he suggested that they were best discussed by both PCCs together, but as the status of the combined PCC to pass binding resolutions was not clear, it was suggested that whatever was agreed became resolutions in the individual PCC meetings.

A discussion took place of whether the person specification could include a requirement that the job be taken by a Christian, but it was agreed that (in line with jobs offered at Diocesan house or at Girl's Brigade's head office) it was important that the job was open to anyone with the necessary skills and knowledge. It was generally agreed that the advertisement should ideally be distributed as widely as possible, for example in the broadsheet, but the limited time scale meant that only a notice sheet advertisement would be circulated in time for the 'overlap' period proposed by Team Time. It was agreed that the advertisement should be in the notice sheet for the next Sunday, but that the job should be advertised in school newsletters and on Parish Notice boards as well if this can be arranged.

The issue of whether there was any contingency plan if the advertisement did not get a satisfactory response was raised, and Chris said that he had someone in mind.

¹ Lennox, John, (2007), *God's Undertaker: Has science buried God*, Lion Hudson. (ISBN-10: 0745953034).

It was agreed that the standing committees of the two PCCs could agree the final details, but a PCC member asked whether all members of both PCCs could see the advertisement (for information rather than comment) prior to Sunday, and this was also agreed.

It was agreed that an interview would be needed even if there was only one applicant, and while the Team Time proposal that the interview is with the Rector and two churchwardens was accepted, it was agreed that the Liz should be one of these churchwardens to avoid an all male panel.

Square brackets in the job description were clarified to indicate elements of the job currently undertaken that may prove difficult to be completed within the hours allotted – owing to Naomi often working more hours than she was paid for. These elements would be considered for ‘outsourcing’ to volunteers. (An honorarium for such work was suggested, but the view of the meeting was that these tasks were no different in essence from other voluntary jobs done by church members.)

Individual PCCs were asked to pass resolutions for what had been agreed.

5. Any other business

- a. **Trusteeship:** it was agreed that the documents circulated from the diocese regarding the duties of trusteeship should be discussed, but that this was better suited to being given more time at the combined PCC meeting following the AGMs, i.e. after the election of new members.
- b. **Living faith:** Sid reported that the training day had put many restrictions on the type of event that could be included in the initiative and our team had struggled to make a proposal. An event to give parents of children approaching teen-age a Christian perspective on coping with teen age children was eventually decided upon, but a follow up meeting was poorly attended – and there did not seem much enthusiasm for continuing with this approach. An alternative suggestion of a communal Christmas meal for those who would otherwise be alone at Christmas was also suggested, but it was noted that this was not in line with the original aim of being around Mothering Sunday. Further suggestions would be welcomed by Naomi or Sid.

6. Close

The meeting closed at 9:10 pm to be followed by individual PCC meetings.

7. Next Meeting

The next combined PCC meeting will take place on January 27th 2008 at St Matthews Harwell at 7:45.

(To be signed as a true record by the individual PCCs at their next meeting.)

..... Chairman

..... Secretary