Historic gathering of overseas bishops in Yorkshire deepens Anglican links across four continents

Links have been strengthened and understanding deepened across seven countries and four continents as a result of a unique global gathering of our overseas link bishops in the diocese this April.

The bishops, from Sri Lanka, Sudan, South West Virginia, Tanzania, Sweden, Pakistan and Germany, were welcomed at a celebration service in Wakefield Cathedral (pictured top left) attended by link supporters from across the diocese. The overseas bishops, with our own area bishops, then spent five days together in prayer and discussion at Parcevall Hall, Appletreewick (pictured right). Themes included ‘spirituality and worship’, ‘sexuality, money and power’ and ‘shaping our common future’.

The gathering concluded with a forum and service at Leeds Minster where the congregation was invited to ‘quiz the bishops’.

Bishop Nick said that the visits had proved of immense value. “In our time away, we talked, prayed and laughed together, and the honesty and mutual trust in our conversations was remarkable. Despite all being part of the Anglican Communion we operate in surprisingly different contexts.

“We now need to work out how we proceed as partner dioceses. For example, how might multilateral rather than bilateral links work? How can we work out a system for clergy and parishioners from different worlds to visit, serve and learn from one another? This is the challenge for us now. Our worlds have collided, but we have subsequently spun off into new directions and renewed relationships. It is very exciting.”

Pictured below, (left to right): Bishop George Okoth of Mara, Tanzania; Senior Matthias Rein of Erfurt, Germany; Bishop John Samuel of Faisalabad, Pakistan; Bishop Åke Bonnier of Skara Sweden; Bishop Mark Bourlakas of Southwestern Virginia, USA; Archbishop Ezekial Kondo of Sudan; Bishop Dhilo Canagasabey of Colombo, Sri Lanka; and Bishop Nick.
‘Disciples of all nations’

Bishop Paul Slater

Matthew’s gospel records Jesus’ last words before he took his leave of this world: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…”

When the Link Bishops gathered at the beginning of our time together on Sunday afternoon in Wakefield Cathedral, the two things which struck me were that we were all male and that for many of us we were meeting for the first time. Despite the first, we knew that we were meeting on behalf of the whole of the churches we represented and had a responsibility to speak as best we could using different voices. And the second meant that we really did not know what would happen.

It has been a joy to share in each other’s worship, to sing each other’s songs, to laugh at each other’s jokes, pray into each other’s contexts and to hear from each other what the pressing issues are in each of our churches. We spent time with some biblical passages, hearing from each other in pairs what the text looked like through each other’s eyes and then reporting back to the wider group what we had heard.

All this helped to build up strong personal relationships which helped us to believe the very best about each other when it came to talking about difficult issues from our different perspectives. We talked about unity in diversity and it was a privilege to be part of a process which made that a reality.

That unity was immediately felt, when hours after we departed from Parcevall Hall, we heard of the news of the terrorist attack in Stockholm. That we had spent a week with Åke, bishop of Skara, who would be flying back into Stockholm over the weekend, gave us a new perspective and a new way of praying for the people there.

A great week...one which has helped us to put more flesh onto Jesus’ words to make disciples of all nations.

+Paul
Bishop of Richmond

Climate Change Conference

HUDDERSFIELD From destructive flooding in West Yorkshire to devastating drought in the link diocese of Mara, the impacts of the changing climate are too serious to ignore. This was the message from Diocesan Environment Officer, Jemima Parker, one of the speakers at a one day conference that explored the relationship between faith and science held at the University of Huddersfield. The conference was organized by the parish of Honley with Brockholes and is part of a one year project called Water of Life supported by the Scientists in Congregations Initiative and funded by the Templeton Foundation. Bishop of Huddersfield, Jonathan Gibbs (pictured) also spoke, together with academics from the university and a representative from the Committee on Climate Change.
More than 150 people from across the diocese and beyond gathered in Immanuel College in Bradford last month to explore ways of growing the church’s ministry with young people. “Youth work across the country is in urgent need of growth,” was the message from the Bishop’s Adviser for Church Growth, Canon Robin Gamble. “Many children attend church or other related groups when they are younger, such as Sunday School, uniformed groups, or parent and toddlers – but as they get older, so often they drift away, distracted by things which can draw them away from faith.”

Sessions, looking at ways to turn around the situation, were led by a team including Robin Gamble, Liz Morton, Canon Sam Corley of Leeds Minster, and Sammi Tooze.

Ripon Cathedral will feature in the second series of the flagship ITV period drama Victoria which stars Jenna Coleman, Rufus Sewell and Tom Hughes.

Filming has taken place at the cathedral with a location unit spending three days in Ripon, one day to get in and ‘dress the set’, one day filming and one day to return everything back to normal. The Cathedral’s south nave aisle and north quire aisle were used to depict Westminster Abbey and Hall for the next series, expected to be broadcast in Autumn 2017.

Welcoming cast and crew into the building was the Dean of Ripon, the Very Revd John Dobson, who said, “Ripon Cathedral has been transported back in time by about 160 years and moved south by 230 miles! We are thoroughly enjoying hosting the filming of Victoria, serving as Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament.”

St Edmund’s Roundhay has hosted one of the last weeks of this year’s night shelter project for destitute asylum seekers. The scheme is run by the West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network and is in its second year in Leeds. One of the volunteers at St Edmund’s, Jean Livesey, said, “We had up to seven guests each night – from Zimbabwe, Iraq, Eritrea, Egypt and Iran. I was moved by their endurance and their gratitude. I learned about the asylum system and was very humbled by the positive attitude and determination of our guests. It’s shocking to think that by simply being born in a different country, it could be my family going through the same terrible experience.”

Ninety pupils from an Ossett primary school staged a mock wedding at their local parish church as part of a school project on wedding ceremonies in different cultures and religions. There were bellringers, an organist, a cake, rings, the signing of the register, photos, confetti, a sandwich reception and even a best man’s speech as part of the wedding friendship ceremony, conducted by Vicar of Trinity Church, Revd Clive Hicks. He gave a short talk about friendship before the couple exchanged vows and rings in the context of friendship rather than marriage.
Church Growth and help for refugees on Synod agenda

Forty percent of our churches are growing. In an upbeat presentation to Diocesan Synod meeting at Ashville College in Harrogate last month, the Bishop’s Adviser on Church Growth, Canon Robin Gamble (below) revealed that 40% of churches across the diocese have grown in the past three years. “If we had done the same exercise five years ago,” said Robin, “we would have discovered that 21%-22% of our churches were growing, which was the national average.”

Based on ‘Usual Sunday Attendance’ figures, Church Growth team member, Sammi Tooze (right), told members that “the figures are really exciting because they show that we are coming out of decline... If every church across the diocese gains one person in the next year we come out of decline.”

The possibility of using empty vicarages for refugee families in urgent temporary need came a step closer when church leaders agreed to back an amended motion, calling on the Diocesan Board to “consider making available for short term letting any diocesan property falling or remaining vacant, to effectively support the Church’s work with refugees and others in crisis.”

Members also agreed to the appointment of a successor to Bishop James Bell. Bishop Nick paid tribute to Bishop James, at his final Synod before retiring at the end of April. He apologised for having to talk about the Bishop’s Consultation for his successor while he was still here, but reminded members that he had a legal duty to consult them as to whether or not the post of Area Bishop of Ripon should be filled. Synod members approved unanimously that there should continue to be a future Bishop of Ripon.

New Director of Lay Training

The diocese’s new Director of Lay Training is to be former chaplain to Salford’s Media City UK, the Revd Hayley Matthews. Hayley became the first chaplain to the fast-growing media area around Salford Quays in 2010. Before that she was curate at Lancaster Priory where she was also chaplain to the Duke’s Theatre and a member of Blackburn Diocese’s Communications Committee.

Hayley, who will start her new role this month, said, “This is a wonderful new role and I’m really excited about how all the aspects of the diocese are coming together. I’m looking forward to encouraging people from all walks of life into lay ministry in its many forms and helping them ‘get a handle’ on vocation. I really want to create a widening in participation to enable people from all backgrounds to get involved.”