

Mike's message

Reconciliation

I'm writing this during a period of free time while away at a conference. Every two years the Diocese of Lichfield invite clergy to The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire. The conference is a great time, not only to explore issues that we encounter in our ministry, but also to catch up with friends old and new. I'm feeling old as this is now my twelfth conference! Having spent all 24 years (so far) of ordained ministry in Lichfield Diocese I know a lot of people here and, in such a large Diocese (all of Staffordshire, the northern half of Shropshire and a great chunk of the Black Country) it's only on occasions such as this that we meet up.



This year's theme is 'Reconciliation'. Each day starts with Bible Study entertainingly led by a Roman Catholic Jesuit, Nicolas King. He examines how the rifts that separate us from God and each other can be healed. On the first day we then went on to look at 'Forgiveness' as a sub-theme - how it can be the most difficult and painful process, but at the heart of a wider reconciliation. This was led by Revd Dr Stephen Cherry (Dean, King's College, Cambridge). It's too easy to simply avoid those we've wronged, or have wronged us, but the Christian faith demands that we reach out and seek to live alongside - and in communion with - those we need to forgive or be forgiven by.

The next sub-theme was 'Reconciliation and Ecology'. The speaker, Prof Richard Bauckham (St Andrew's University) took the image of humanity as 'stewards of creation' (as portrayed in Genesis 1 and 2) and, looking at Colossians 1.15 - 20, we explored what reconciliation with all creation might involve. What do the challenges of the affect humanity has on the environment mean for us as Christians?

The final keynote speaker will be Revd Dr Andrea Russell, from The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham (where I trained). She'll be leading us in a very promising session on 'The role of humour and laughter in Reconciliation'. Add to this some optional workshops, a superb comedian on Tuesday evening, a Ceilidh on Wednesday, excellent food and, of course, a well stocked bar - a great time is being had by all.

Reconciliation is at the heart of the Christian faith. In Jesus Christ, God has reached out to us in an act of immense, all giving love. In Jesus Christ we are reconciled to God, no matter what we have done or who we are.

In a world of so many divisions, our role as Christians is to be reconciled with others and help others to be reconciled with each other, as we are with Christ in God.