

GENERAL SYNOD 2013

Council for Mission Report

Proposed by the Very Revd Stephen Lowry, Dean of Dromore

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I read an interesting story about a person who was totally absorbed in himself.

Vladimir Nabokov was a Russian born novelist. His work has never been praised for its compassion. A very single minded man. He was staying with his family on holiday to enlarge his collection of butterflies and moths. One day he returned from an afternoon searching for butterflies when he told his family that he had heard someone groaning piteously along side a little river. “What was wrong with him?” they asked. “I don’t know: I had to get the butterfly”. The next day the body of an aged prospector was found at the river in what was then named “Dead Man’s Gulch” in Nabokov’s honour. While people around us are dying, how often we chase butterflies. I refer members to the resolution on page 353 of the Book of Reports - Resolution 1:

“That the General Synod, recognising this to be a time of critical need and of missional opportunity in Ireland, north and south, calls on every parish, diocese and body within the Church, to make it a priority to fulfil the Great Commission of Christ with urgency, imagination and energy.”

(a story told by Clifton Fadiman, in The Little Brown Book of Anecdotes)

The church does itself no favours when it becomes so absorbed in its own interests and pursuits that it fails to see the people in the world around it. Jesus and the early apostles recognised this danger and invited followers of Jesus to turn their eyes away from themselves to go into all the world and win the kingdom.

As a church we *know* that in our heads, we *acknowledge* it with our creeds, we *declare* it in our worship, yet we continue to become self absorbed in issues which leaves the world around us thinking that we have no other interest but those which concern priesthood and sex.

The Council for Mission recognises the danger in leaving such issues unresolved, and commends those who are trying to sort them out, but challenges the church to focus its efforts on the gospel of Christ which speaks of repentance and faith, and offers hope for the world. While people around us are dying, how often we chase butterflies.

And so I commend members of General Synod to ask themselves as they debate the issues before us this Synod “How can we best fulfil the Lord’s Great Commission?”

We encourage parishes to use the model of Acts 1:8 which has a threefold outlook on mission: of which our own local Jerusalem is only a part, and to consider the ways in which we are reaching or NOT reaching the people there and in our Judea and Samaria – our dioceses and island, - and the ends of the earth.

Instead of chasing our own butterflies. Let us get consumed in the love of Jesus with a desire to serve our communities and our world.

When the local parish gets so consumed in the needs and concerns of the community around it, people begin to realise that the gospel is not something just proclaimed, it is also a gospel practised. The only Gospel worth proclaiming is a Gospel that invites believers into action.

If we live to ourselves we will die on our own.

To be practical may I suggest firstly:

(1) that each Diocesan Synod supports its bishop in creating or re-creating a local diocesan council for mission, giving it a voice at Diocesan Synod and giving your diocese representation at the General Synod Council for Mission? (the vacancies on our list of members indicates that these voices are not currently being heard).

(2) May I suggest *secondly* that each parish, group, rural or area deanery identifies a form of outreach which is relevant to the community in which God has placed you? Whether that is a form of debt counselling, (CAP centres have been developed in association with local churches in our area LURGAN, BELFAST, BANGOR) a week of services in a church or hall, (one diocese has a week of Mission planned for 2015 and its bishop has invited every member of every vestry in the diocese to attend a training evening) or a distribution of scriptures in collaboration with like minded Christian people in the area! (we read of an initiative called A Free Gift for All, involving the distribution of the Gospel of Luke to every home in Londonderry during Derry's year as the UK City of Culture: several church traditions sharing in the event.).

(3) May I suggest *thirdly* that parishes identify a partnership with a parish or diocese overseas which would benefit from our interest: my own parish has worked with others and helped part-provide a jeep, fund the building of a pastor's house, assist in developing a Mothers' Union building and offering on-going support for education and medical care in Maridi South Sudan. Led by the diocesan bishop this link has become part and parcel of our parish thinks of itself: outreach and mission is now at the heart of the local church.

While people around us are dying, how often we chase butterflies.

Friends and colleagues in mission, may I commend the Great commission to you and invite you to support the report of the Council for Mission and the resolutions written in it?