

NEWSFLASH [MAY 17]

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3 May 2017

To

The College of Bishops

Archbishops' Pastoral Letter

to the Parishes and Chaplaincies of the Church of England, for the General Election.

Private and Confidential Embargoed until 00.01, Saturday May 6th 2017,

The season of Easter invites us to celebrate and to renew our love of God and our love of neighbour, our trust and hope in God and in each other. In the midst of a frantic and sometimes fraught election campaign, our first obligation as Christians is to pray for those standing for office, and to continue to pray for those who are elected. We recognise the enormous responsibilities and the vast complexity of the issues that our political leaders face. We are constantly reminded of the personal costs and burdens carried by those in political life and by their families.

Our second obligation as Christians at these times is to set aside apathy and cynicism and to participate, and encourage others to do the same. At a practical level that could mean putting on a hustings event for candidates, volunteering for a candidate, or simply making sure to vote on Thursday 8th June. The Christian virtues of love, trust and hope should guide and judge our actions, as well as the actions and policies of all those who are seeking election to the House of Commons and to lead our country.

This election is being contested against the backdrop of deep and profound questions of identity. Opportunities to renew and reimagine our shared values as a country and a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland only come around every few generations. We are in such a time.

Our Christian heritage, our current choices and our obligations to future generations and to God's world will all play a shaping role. If our shared British values are to carry the weight of where we now stand and the challenges ahead of us, they must have at their core

cohesion, courage and stability.

Cohesion is what holds us together. The United Kingdom, when at its best, has been represented by a sense not only of living for ourselves, but by a deeper concern for the weak, poor and marginalised, and for the common good. At home that includes education for all, the need for urgent and serious solutions to our housing challenges, the importance of creating communities as well as buildings, and a confident and flourishing health service that gives support to all - especially the vulnerable - not least at the beginning and end of life. Abroad it is seen in many ways, including the 0.7% Aid commitment, properly applied in imaginative ways, standing up for those suffering persecution on grounds of faith, and our current leading on campaigns against slavery, trafficking, and sexual violence in conflicts.

Courage, which includes aspiration, competition and ambition, should guide us into trading agreements that, if they are effective and just, will also reduce the drivers for mass movements of peoples. We must affirm our capacity to be an outward looking and generous country, with distinctive contributions to peacebuilding, development, the environment and welcoming the stranger in need. Our economic and financial systems at home and abroad should aim to be engines of innovation, not simply traders for their own account. The need for a just economy is clear, but there is also the relatively new and influential area of 'just finance', and there are dangers of an economy over-reliant on debt, which risks crushing those who take on too much. Courage also demands a radical approach to education, so that the historic failures of technical training and the over-emphasis on purely academic subjects are rebalanced, growing productivity and tackling with vigour the exclusion of the poorest groups from future economic life.

Stability, an ancient and Benedictine virtue, is about living well with change. Stable communities will be skilled in reconciliation, resilient in setbacks and diligent in sustainability, particularly in relation to the environment. They will be ones in which we can be collectively a nation of 'glad and generous hearts'. To our concern for housing, health and education as foundations for a good society, we add marriage, the family and the household as foundational communities, which should be nurtured and supported as such, not just for the benefit of their members, but as a blessing for the whole of society.

Contemporary politics needs to re-evaluate the importance of religious belief. The assumptions of secularism are not a reliable guide to the way the world works, nor will they enable us to understand the place of faith in other people's lives. Parishes and Chaplaincies of the Church of England serve people of all faiths and none. Their contribution and that of other denominations and faiths to the well-being of the nation is immense – schools, food banks, social support, childcare among many others - and is freely offered. But the role of faith in society is not just measured in terms of service- delivery.

The new Parliament, if it is to take religious freedom seriously, must treat as an essential task the improvement of religious literacy. More immediately, if we aspire to a politics of maturity and generosity, then the religious faith of any election candidate should not be treated by opponents as a vulnerability to be exploited. We look forward to a media and political climate where all candidates can feel confident that they can be open about the impact of their faith on their vocation to public service.

Religious belief is the well-spring for the virtues and practices that make for good individuals, strong relationships and flourishing communities. In Britain, these embedded virtues are not unique to Christians, but they have their roots in the Christian history of our four nations. If treated as partners in the project of serving the country, the churches – and other faiths – have much to contribute to a deep understanding and outworking of the common good.

Political responses to the problems of religiously-motivated violence and extremism, at home and overseas, must also recognise that solutions will not be found simply in further secularisation of the public realm. Mainstream religious communities have a central role to play; whilst

extremist narratives require compelling counter-narratives that have a strong theological and ideological foundation.

Cohesion, courage and stability are all needed in our response to the continuing national conversation about migration and refugees. Offering a generous and hospitable welcome to refugees and migrants is a vital expression of our common humanity, but it is not without cost and we should not be deaf to the legitimate concerns that have been expressed about the scale of population flows and the differential impact it has on different parts of society. The pressures of integration must be shared more equitably.

These deep virtues and practices – love, trust and hope, cohesion, courage and stability - are not the preserve of any one political party or worldview, but go to the heart of who we are as a country in all of its diversity. An election campaign, a Parliament and a Government that hold to these virtues give us a firm foundation on which to live well together, for the common good.

We keep in our prayers all those who are standing in this election and are deeply grateful for their commitment to public service. All of us as Christians, in holding fast to the vision of abundant life, should be open to the call to renounce cynicism, to engage prayerfully with the candidates and issues in this election and by doing so to participate together fully in the life of our communities.

In the Name of our Risen Lord,

+ Josh Carter.

+ Benjamin Eboransis

2. The St Nicholas' Audio System

BACKGROUND

At a PCC Meeting earlier this year the Rector requested that consideration be given to the installation of an Audio System in the church.

The reasons for the request were two fold. Firstly the Rector was finding it a considerable strain to project her voice to the whole of the church particularly when it was full with a large wedding or funeral due to the sound adsorbtion of people's clothing. Secondly a number of regular parishioners had expressed that they were having some difficulty in hearing some of the Lessons and Gospel readings.

The Rector stated that she was certain that she could obtain atleast some of the funding from a church benefactor and that she was prepared to raise other sums by sponsorship of her London Marathon run in April. PCC agreed that we should obtain quotes from contractors with experience in audio installations in churches and that Graham Stacey and Chris Chacksfield should visit church/es of similar size to St Nicholas' where they had installed systems.

The PCC agreed the quotation and the St Nicholas' system was installed in the first week of May.

The System

Work on article in progress

NEWSFLASH [MAR 17]

Official Biography of the Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft

Steven Croft was born in Halifax in 1957. He read classics and theology at Worcester College, Oxford from 1976- 1980 and went on to study for the priesthood in Durham at Cranmer Hall, St John's College. It was there that he was awarded his doctorate on the Psalms in 1984.

After being ordained in London in 1983 he served as Curate of St. Andrew's, Enfield before returning to Yorkshire as Vicar of Ovenden in Halifax in 1987. Ovenden is a parish of large council estates where Steven's father grew up and where his grandmother still lived. Under his leadership, the church established a large network of community groups and grew in size to over 400 people of all ages, largely through adults coming to faith.

Steven became Warden of his old theological college in 1996 and returned to Durham to lead the training of men and women for Anglican and Methodist ministry. He wrote widely about his experiences as a parish priest and began to express increasing concern about how urgent is the task for the Church to re-engage with huge swathes of the population which it had completely lost touch with the Christian faith.

Shortly after Rowan Williams was appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury, Steven was appointed as Archbishops' Missioner and Leader of the Fresh Expressions team. He and Ann returned to live in Oxford with their family from 2004-2009. The family were part of St Andrew's Oxford, their parish church and Steven also assisted regularly at St. Michael's, Summertown.

For four years he oversaw the emergence of Fresh Expressions – an initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in conjunction with the Methodist Church aimed at encouraging new ways of being church in the 21st century. Steven appointed and grew a team of twenty full and part time staff. Fresh expressions of church are now a significant and growing part of the life of every diocese in the Church of England and the principles and materials developed by the team have been applied in many other denominations and across the world.

In January 2009 Steven was consecrated Bishop of Sheffield and began public ministry in May of that year. His aim in the first two years was to get to know the Diocese, which included spending time with each deanery, visiting the clergy in their homes, as well as becoming familiar with the hospitals, prisons and schools of the Diocese.

At the heart of Bishop Steven's ministry in Sheffield has been a desire to connect the Church across the Diocese more deeply together as one body with a common sense of mission and purpose and to enable the diocese to re-engage with mission in the wider community with confidence and hope. He has engaged and worked creatively with Anglicans of all traditions in a very diverse Diocese.

Together with the Bishop's Council and the senior team, Bishop Steven has led the development of a strategy for evangelism and growth across the Diocese which is bearing significant fruit. The strategy is rooted in an annual ten days of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost and an annual cycle of sharing and teaching

the faith in every parish. Steven has overseen the release of £1 million of historic reserves for a project that will have a positive impact on 4,000 young people's lives, begun the development of St Peter's College, a virtual hub for learning across the Diocese; developed a six year project to deploy Development Workers in mission partnerships in poor communities to release the energy of the clergy for mission; encouraged and nurtured church plants and fresh expressions of church and overseen the launch of the new Common Fund.

In his seven years in Sheffield, the central services of the Diocese have been transformed to serve the diocesan vision with the creation of a new Parish Support team and a significant and effective investment in communications. Over 80 per cent of parishes now have mission action plans. The diocese has a growing number of ordinands and candidates for lay ministry. The Cathedral has been completely re-ordered. In 2014 the Diocese of Sheffield celebrated its centenary with a series of conferences, celebrations and teaching events. In 2015, the Sheffield welcomed Her Majesty the Queen for the Royal Maundy, held its first Diocesan Conference for 12 years and hosted the first Northern Bishops Mission with 22 bishops from every Diocese in the northern province sharing faith in over 100 parishes.

Bishop Steven is one of two Bishops elected to the Archbishops Council and is Chair of the Ministry Council of the Church of England. In that capacity he oversees all selection and training for ministry in the Church of England. Over the last six years he has led the development of the Common Awards in theological education and is a key part of the national Renewal and Reform programme.

Bishop Steven was a member of the Sheffield Fairness Commission in 2012-13, chairs the Faith Leaders' group in Sheffield and became a member of the House of Lords in October 2013. He is patron of a number of charities including St Luke's Hospice, the Cathedral Archer Project, Assist and Hope for the Future, a local charity which campaigns on climate issues. In 2012 he represented the Archbishop of Canterbury at the worldwide Synod of Bishops on Evangelisation in Rome and speaks and teaches widely in the United Kingdom and overseas.

Steven is married to Ann who is originally from Bristol. Ann trained as a nurse at the John Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford. Steven and Ann were married in St Ebbe's, Oxford in 1978 and lived the first two years of their married life in Jericho. Ann retrained as a nursery nurse in mid life and over the last five years has led an innovative parent and toddler group which meets in the nave of Sheffield Cathedral. Steven and Ann have four adult children: Paul, Andy (married to Beth), Amy (married to Simon) and Sarah. Their first grandchild, Josiah, was born in February 2015. Steven is a keen cook and bakes his own bread.

Bishop Steven is a co-author of *Emmaus: the way of faith* (1996-2003), a set of resources for Christian nurture widely used in the UK and across the world and one of four lead authors of the new *Pilgrim* resource to help adults explore faith. He is author of a number of books including *Ministry in Three Dimensions* (1999 and 2008). His first novel for children and adults, *The Advent Calendar* was published in 2006. In 2009, *Jesus' People: What the Church should do next* challenged the reader to rethink both the role of Jesus in the Church and that of the Church in today's society and culture. He writes regular Bible notes for *Reflections for Daily Prayer* and is currently working on a book of ten biblical reflections on leadership for people in every walk of life, to be published in September. In November, his blog won the Premier Digital Award for the most inspiring leadership blog of 2015.

Bishop Steven can be found on
Facebook (Bishop Steven Croft)
Twitter (@Steven_Croft)

His blog can be found at www.blogs.oxford.anglican.org