

CHURCH TIMES

Letters to the Editor

20 MAY 2022

ISTOCK



Truro's Transforming Mission plan

From the Revd Rosheen Browning

Sir, — The Bishops of [Truro](#) and [St Germans](#) have been robust in their defence of both Transforming Mission (TM) and the programme for a sustainable future, On the Way.

When Phase 2 of TM went to bid, the Camborne Cluster of Churches was in regular contact with only 20 children and young people per month, on average. By June 2021, this was 115, and by this May, it had reached 460 children and young people and 228 parents or carers across the Cluster.

Save the Parish have not concerned themselves with: our initiatives to offer meals to families each week; the two new toddler groups; the holiday clubs; Wild Church, which runs in our two most rural settings, or Secret Church — all of which bring children to churches that previously had none. This is not to mention the Church Kitchen, to feed the local homeless; the prayer walks in housing estates where the current church congregation won't go; and the relentless dedicated support of our churchwardens and lay ministers.

There is an amazing team at TM Camborne, and God is bringing multiple blessings to this area. For all of that I am truly grateful.

ROSHEEN BROWNING

Priest-in-Charge of the Camborne Cluster of Churches and TM Lead

The Vicarage, 37 Trethannas Gardens

Praze-an-Beeble, Camborne TR14 0LL

From Mr David Watters

Sir, — The long report on activities in [Truro diocese](#) prompts some serious questions about the motivation of the Save the Parish group, who appear to have an axe that they wish to grind in a disagreeable and bad-tempered manner without reflecting any gospel values. This perplexes those of us who are grappling with the real problem of seeking a future for the Kingdom in the diocese.

DAVID WATTERS

Lay Chair, East Wivelshire deanery synod

Jasione, Front Road

Downderry PL11 3JY

From Mrs Hilary Geary

Sir, — We are given to understand that the Archbishops admitted that they “got it wrong” by not prioritising rural parishes. I hope that the Bishop of Truro has got the memo about their change of heart.

Here in rural Cornwall, taking just one example, St Mary’s, Merrymeet, is being closed by the diocese. The congregation is devastated. Post-pandemic, it was thriving, with about 20-23 enthusiastic souls. The village’s only public building, it is also much used by the community.

Yes, budgets are tight, and the parish was a little behind with Ministry and Mission Fund payments. The little church offered to clear its deficit in payments due to the diocese, but this was turned down. The roof does need attention in the next few years, and, although initial grant funding has not been forthcoming, the village can raise funds through social events.

Closure is a drastic step and may not save any money. The congregation will split irrecoverably, and few will transfer to another church (in some rural places, travel is not possible and, in Cornwall, there is a particularly strong sense of place). Here is parish “growth” and “fruitfulness” in reverse!

If the [Archbishop of York](#) wants parishes to be “trusting the dioceses much more and working in collaboration with them”, the dioceses need to cut their own costs and begin treating the parishes less high-handedly.

HILARY GEARY

Kestrel, Kingswood Estate

Merrymeet, Liskeard

Cornwall PL14 3LR

From Mr Neil Wallis

Sir, — The Bishop of St Germans, the Rt Revd Hugh Nelson, insisted that the diocese's On the Way (OTW) programme of cuts was “an intentionally grass-roots led initiative”. The Bishops don't even see the final plans until they have been approved locally, he said. He has repeated this claim in the media and publicly elsewhere —which is a pity, as it is sophistry at best.

In December 2021, a report about OTW in Carnmarth North deanery synod detailed “discussions the Steering Group had had with Bishop Hugh earlier in the day” regarding what the Bishop called “the elephant in the room” — in other words, the difficulty of rolling out Transforming Mission locally while simultaneously implementing cuts.

On 28 April 2022, “Issue 10 — On The Way Update” reported: “[Rural Dean] Caspar [Bush] went on to repeat the answers that had been received by the Steering Group from *[sic]* their questions when they met with Bishop Hugh and Archdeacon Paul [Bryer].”

The document then details five specific instructions they were given to “achieve the Deanery plan”. There is not space here to spell out all the directives they received from the Bishop, but one is particularly revealing: “There was a possibility for TM [Transforming Mission] money to be reset if necessary to achieve the Deanery [OTW] Plan.”

In other words, despite many diocesan denials, Save The Parish (Cornwall) is correct that the finances and operations of TM and OTW are inextricably intertwined, and there must be a full honest and transparent audit of them to ensure millions of pounds are not wasted, many more priests are not axed, and our rural churches not closed.

What the above also shows is that Save the Parish is also correct that OTW is very much a bishop-led, top-down, not bottom-up, process.

NEIL WALLIS

Save the Parish (Cornwall)

Address supplied

From Susan Roberts

Sir, — The Bishop of Truro, the Rt Revd Philip Mounstephen, was short-sighted in his response to campaigners from Save the Parish. Even the briefest of meetings would have

served to defuse the situation. If there were facts to “correct” and alternative arguments to bring to the table, he could have done so.

SUSAN ROBERTS

Save the Parish (Cornwall)

Address supplied

New Triennium Funding and the General Synod

From Mr Sam Margrave

Sir, — The Archbishops have launched what they dub Triennium Funding ([News, 13 May](#)), allocating £3.6 billion of the Church’s money. Yet again, like the [Vision and Strategy](#) in recent years, the [General Synod](#) has not been involved in discerning, discussing, or deciding our direction or the allocation of billions of pounds.

Inside the Church of England, we have witnessed a wholesale reorganisation without a single vote taking place by the Church’s parliament.

Why has the Synod been side-stepped again on an important decision in the Church? How will this decision be scrutinised, if not by the Synod?

It used to be said the Church of England was episcopally led and synodically governed. When did that cease to be the case?

SAM MARGRAVE

General Synod member

50 Leyland Road, Nuneaton

Warwickshire CV1 14RP

Too early to assign blame for Post Office scandal

From the Revd Martin King

Sir, — Mr Edward Bevin ([Letters, 13 May](#)) deplores the sufferings of the sub-postmasters being revealed by the Horizon Inquiry, as I am sure all right-minded people do. He goes on to assert that the Revd Paula Vennells should return her CBE. In effect, he declares her guilty and pronounces sentence. Your readers may prefer to abide by the established principle of justice that no one should be found guilty without the proper opportunity to hear and challenge the evidence against them.

The Horizon Inquiry is rightly part-way through hearing the evidence of the sufferings of the sub-postmasters. It is clear, with the benefit of hindsight, that great injustice has been perpetrated by the Post Office as an organisation. Anyone, however, with experience of such large and complex organisations with the necessary hierarchical management structure will know that what may be obvious at the grass-roots may be concealed from the highest management levels. The inquiry is scheduled later to hear evidence of what was known to whom and when at a later date, and will reach its conclusions on that evidence.

I hope that others will, as Sir Tom Scholar has intimated he intends, reserve any condemnation until the inquiry is concluded and it becomes clear which of the many parties involved are truly responsible.

MARTIN KING

29 Parkfields

Welwyn Garden City

Hertfordshire AL8 6EE

Unsatisfactory delay in John Smyth investigation

From "Graham"

Sir, — One year ago today, 20 May 2021, the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#) issued a statement, after meeting privately with some victims of John Smyth QC. He stated, inter alia, that “These victims are rightly concerned that no one appears to have faced any sanction yet, when it is clear a number of Christians, clergy and lay, were made aware of the abuse in the 1980s and many learned in subsequent years.”

He went on to say: “I have made it clear that the National [Safeguarding](#) Team will investigate every clergy person or others within their scope of whom they have been informed who knew and failed to disclose the abuse.”

This was reported by the *Church Times* ([News, 20 May 2021](#)) under the headline “Archbishop Welby announces further investigations into John Smyth case”.

One year later, not one has been held to account. I have not been interviewed, or asked to provide a list of names. No one is suspended. No one, so far as we are aware, is under a [Clergy Discipline Measure](#) process.

As a victim, I regard the Archbishop’s words as appearing to be just hot air: promises unfulfilled. Has he “kept in touch” with these investigations, as he claimed he did in 2013? Or

has he just assumed that someone else is dealing with it, which he described at IICSA as “not an acceptable human response, let alone a leadership response” ([News, 23 March 2018](#))?

As the Makin review has been delayed yet again, it will report more than ten years after I first disclosed, and nine years since the Archbishop was first told. Is that good enough?

GRAHAM

(Name and address supplied)

Evangelical engagement with the LLF materials

From the Revd Dr Che Seabourne

Sir, — As a Charismatic [Evangelical](#), I would not seek to deny that there are leaders at other churches who have not felt able to engage with the *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF) materials ([Letters, 13 May](#)).

I am, however, aware of a far greater number of Evangelical clergy who have facilitated the course in good faith for members of their congregations.

I am currently leading my second LLF course and although, for obvious reasons, I cannot share detailed reflections, an [LGBTI+](#) member of our congregation gave me permission to share their hopefulness for the process: a hopefulness that acknowledges different opinions and perspectives in a spirit of true fellowship, love, and mutual respect.

I have been accused of naïvety, but it is surely not beyond our collective imagination to discern a way forward. This may be difficult, and involve at least a degree of amicable separation; but pain in the night may yet become joy in the morning.

CHE SEABOURNE

General Synod Member

The Rectory, 1 Vicarage View

Kirkstall, Leeds LS5 3HF