

THE NARTHEX

November-December 2019
*'And the disciples were first called
Christians in Antioch' (Acts 11:26)*

The Orthodox Church of St Dunstan of Canterbury, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset BH14 9JG

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland. Archbishop: Metropolitan Silouan

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch: His Beatitude, John X

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Conferring Together

In May next year we shall have the annual archdiocesan conference as usual. As ever, it would be good if as many of us as possible attend the conference (during the school half-term holiday). In fact, this parish has generally been well represented and apart from anything else, the conference gives to those who attend a clear sense of our common bond in Christ throughout these islands, and the real assurance that we are not alone in our striving in Orthodox Christianity.

Apart from the worship, personal meetings and socialising that occurs during the conference, it is, I think, a fair criticism to suggest that the times spent in the conference hall listening to speakers, has tended towards the academic, giving attention to those standing on the rostrum in search of inspiration. In academe this clearly has its place, as it has, indeed, at an archdiocesan conference. But I do wonder whether a different model might be of greater value in practical terms for the development of our mission and ministry in Christ.

I do not intend this to be, in any way, a criticism of the organisers whether currently or in the past. Indeed, I myself have twice given lectures at conference and academic study and scholarship has been the joy of my life. But whether this can appeal to and attract the generality of the people in our archdiocese is another matter altogether.

There are, of course, always practical concerns around costs and even over the care of the very young. There are bursaries available for those put off by having to find the money and we ourselves, as a parish, have helped our own people attend in the past with grants towards the costs and the sharing of transport. I would have thought, also, that the provision of a crèche would not present too many difficulties, in order to attract families with small children.

My real concern, however, lies in the very purpose of the event. The very point of a conference is to confer. There are plenty of opportunities to raise matters and to question the speakers over their lectures, but I wonder whether there needs

to be time given to work and discussion, and the sharing of ideas that might come from a number of smaller groups, meeting simultaneously. There could be a broad range of topics, united by a common theme, with each group reporting back to a plenary session. The resulting ideas, resolutions and initiatives could then be made available to all at the parish level or, where appropriate, working groups established to serve the whole archdiocese. One small example of what I have in mind might be an archdiocesan training group for liturgical music and the development of our chanters and choirs. If the conference were to throw up the need for such a group, it might eventually develop into a proper institute with its own space on the archdiocesan website (antiochian-orthodox.co.uk) holding regular workshops and training sessions in different parts of the country.

The conference in May 2020 is on the theme of how we respond to our calling within a now, secularised, Britain. It is an interesting topic and addresses an area of our mission whilst confronting the attitudes and world-views found in most of the population here. The danger is that this could become a purely academic exercise, a sociological study of modern Britain: interesting in itself, but something of a dead end if there is no input 'from the floor' of our own people's actual experience and concerns.

This is not to say that there should be no leadership or direction from the top, but at some point the theory, the understanding and analysis has to be interpreted by practical action and affect the way parishes operate and function.

There is no reason why annual conferences organised in this way might not, in the end, help develop a whole series of institutes and functioning bodies dedicated to helping parochial development. This is certainly the case with older, more established Orthodox dioceses, here and abroad. You can see the sort of thing I mean on the American Antiochian website, for example (antiochian.org).

However, there is to my mind, one topic that, as far as I know, has not yet been officially addressed by conference. It has certainly been discussed

private conversations; that is the stark fact that none of our clergy are getting any younger and, apart from a few exceptions, our active time is certainly limited in the natural course of things. Twenty-four years ago when I was ordained, there was a real sense of setting out on a new venture. I am now sixty-five and have gained much from experience, learning and encounters over the years. Certainly there is wisdom gained over the years but one asks, what happens after us? Already, three of the ex-Anglican clergy who visited his Late Beatitude, Ignatius IV of blessed memory, in Paris, back in 1994, have died. Apart from a few exceptions, each of our communities has to ask itself who takes over when the present clergy are no longer capable or have died? Will these missions and parishes continue?

Being the one Orthodox and Apostolic Church we are confidently hierarchical, patriarchal and blessed with the sacred ministry in Christ. We are lead from above: the people by the pastors and presbyters; the clergy by the bishop; the bishop by the Holy Synod, and all under Jesus Christ. This is the ecclesial life finding its early origins outlined in St Paul's pastoral epistles, and continued in the directions found in the letters of the great martyr and bishop, Ignatius of Antioch.

Again, nothing of what I have written here should be taken as a criticism of anyone, when it comes to the archdiocesan conference. For my own part I only regret that in the days when I had to earn my living as a teacher, I did not have the time to give more attention to the common life of our churches.

In other words, the most pressing need for our archdiocese, if we are in any way to proceed into the future, is to have more men coming forward to offer themselves to serve as priests. It is as blunt as that. It is, therefore, the responsibility and duty of all of us to discern and find the right men to take on the necessary theological formation, and to go forward with the appropriate

training, in order to become the presbyters, the priests of our parish communities beyond now.

This raises so many questions, not least the practical ones of livelihood, academic qualifications, possible upheaval in family life, balancing time for ministry with having to earn a living. Not least there is the responsibility laid on us all to provide, from our own means, for the eventual paying of our clergy where necessary or possible.

This, surely, must soon be a topic for our conference as it is such an urgent matter. This is not just about continuing as we are: it is also about our widening mission. If we think for a moment of what it takes to plant the beginnings of an Orthodox mission, what do we need? It is possible for a few lay people to congregate each Lord's Day, perhaps led by a Reader with the bishop's blessing, and hold Reader services of prayers, Bible readings and liturgical hymns. But really to progress we need a priest, a chanter and an altar server (who acts as reader): yes, just three people! If they find a suitable building and have acquired the necessary minimum of liturgical equipment, the Liturgy can be served. Before long the existing Orthodox Christians will start to attend and then the inquirers, and so the mission expands into a proper parish. But that parish in time will need to be one that encourages and discovers other men to come forward to serve under the bishop. This is how we do things, but firstly we need priests in order to do this.

As I have discussed with many of you before, my own vision for St Dunstan's is that it should become a central hub for the mission of the Orthodox Church in the region of Wessex, initially in the area between Bridport to the west, Portsmouth to the east, and with Salisbury to the north. With three priests currently we can probably manage that arc of land under present circumstances. Indeed, in the next few years, we hope to begin establishing mission congregations within that wider area. But such an overall strategy will only continue into the future if we find, train and develop the pastoral ministry. In other words, we need more priests.

The English word, *priest* comes from the Old English, *preost*, which in turn is from the Greek, *πρεσβυτερος* (*presbyteros*) that originally meant an older man, an elder. In early Christianity these 'elders' formed a council around the bishop, sharing certain parts of his sacred ministry, even deputising for him and presiding in his absence. From this originates the parish system with which we are so familiar, where now, the bishop (from the Greek, *επισκοπος*, *episcopos*, 'overseer') is present only from time to time, given the expansion of the faith and the multiplicity of parishes and missions.

I have no idea whether any of

my ideas expressed in the Narthex are right or not, but if I am right on this one, then the number one priority for our archdiocese is to encourage suitable candidates for ordination and, no doubt, in all forms of ministry and service (whether ordained with the laying on of hands by the bishop, or recognised lay officials and assistants, as required in every parish). Before we acquire buildings, develop our policies, organise our giving, set up an efficient administration, plan our mission strategies, or even present the truth of salvation to a lost and secularised world, we need to find more priests among us.

It is very soon in the gospel stories that Our Lord, having begun His ministry (calling all to repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near) chooses the Twelve, the new Israel; in embryo, the foundation of the apostolic ministry. Let us follow that biblical principle. Each one of us can play our own part in this, keeping our eyes open to notice devout, mature and stable men who are able to undertake the necessary academic work and, in humility, develop the pastoral gifts needed for the cure of souls.

This is a priority not only in general terms for the archdiocese, but for our own parish and for every other Antiochian community in Britain and Ireland. Our original commission was built upon the idea of re-hallowing of these islands in its ancient faith, calling all back to that Orthodox Christianity that was present here, according to tradition, as early as the first century AD. We can only fulfil that vocation if, in the first place, we have enough priests and establish congregations who encourage and produce the kind of men who will offer themselves to serve within the altar.

Fr Chrysostom



THE ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN
ARCHDIOCESE OF
THE BRITISH ISLES AND IRELAND
Archdiocesan Conference 2020

**Practical Orthodoxy:
Living as Orthodox Christians in
secular Britain**

with His Eminence,
Metropolitan Silouan

Monday 25 May (3.00 pm) to Wednesday
27th May (2.00 pm)

Yarnfield Park Conference Centre,
Stone, Staffs.

About the Conference

Orthodox Christianity presupposes a lifestyle: worship, daily prayer, fasting, alms-giving, as well as spiritual, personal, and often social struggle. How do we live and proclaim the Gospel in a culture where formal religion is increasingly put to one side and faith is regarded as irrelevant?

All are Welcome!

SERVICES

Vespers is normally served on Saturdays at 5.00pm and on Wednesdays at 6.00pm. (Please enter by the side door)
Fr. Chrysostom is available for Confession afterwards or by appointment. **Orthros** is served before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays at 8.45am

November

Sun 3rd 20th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 10th 21st after Pentecost Divine Liturgy 10.30am Remembrance Sunday [The Act of Remembrance and two-minute silence is observed before the Liturgy begins.]

Fri 15th **Beginning of the Nativity Fast**

Sun 17th 22nd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Thurs 21st Entry of the Theotokos



Sun 24th 23rd after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

December

Sun 1st 24th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 8th 25th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 15th Sunday of the Holy Forefathers 26th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sun 22nd Sunday before the Nativity 27th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Wed 25th **The Nativity of our Lord**
Divine Liturgy 9.30am



Sun 29th Sunday after the Nativity
28th after Pentecost
Divine Liturgy 10.30am