

Report of the talk by Bishop Victoria Matthews 10 July 2011

At a General Synod fringe meeting hosted by the Open Synod Group: Adrian Vincent

The Rt Revd Victoria Matthews is Bishop of Christchurch, New Zealand (and formerly Bishop of Edmonton, Canada). I found her to be an inspirational person.

Bishop Victoria spoke of her work visiting the bereaved and injured from the New Zealand earthquakes. The city council, though secular, had asked the Church to offer leadership in helping the community to recover. She had contacted the Roman Catholic bishop, and suggested that the Churches work ecumenically to assist those affected by the earthquakes. Although the Roman Catholic Church does not agree with the ordination of women, the Roman Catholic bishop had immediately said "tell everyone I'm on board". Once the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches were announced as working together, all the other denominations signed up too.

Bishop Victoria gave examples of women in leadership and proclamation in the Bible:

- the Virgin Mary grew in her womb the body and blood of Christ and was therefore the first celebrant of the Eucharist;
 - apostles had to be witnesses to the resurrection and be sent by Christ, Mary Magdalene fulfilled both criteria;
 - Acts 9, Saul would have been seeking out church leaders to persecute, and the reference to his seeking out men and women disciples of the Lord, suggests that women were in leadership in the early Church;
 - Acts 16, Lydia enabled the Gospel to go to Europe by persuading Paul to preach there.
- She said that the sacraments women priests and bishops celebrate transform lives, people testify how God works in and through them, and that fact cannot be challenged.

Bishop Victoria spoke of the opposition she had received during her ministry from those who disagree with the ordination of women. She said however that all sides need to be heard and it was important that we did not only listen to those with whom we agree. She said that our focus should be on Jesus rather than gender.

Bishop Victoria said that when she became Bishop of Edmonton, most of those who disagreed with the ordination of women were concerned about a woman presiding at the Eucharist. When she became Bishop of Christchurch the concern was about a woman in a role of headship. In both situations she had found ways to make it work. For example, in Edmonton there was an anglo-catholic parish and she had taken the initiative to visit the priest. He had conscientious objections to receiving the Eucharist from her in a service at which she presided, but they agreed that he had no problem sharing the Peace with her. She did not force her ministry on him, she attended Evensong at his Church, and at the next diocesan Eucharist he went out of his way to seek her out and exchange the Peace with her. She said that such relationships only fail when there is a winner and a loser. If we both know that we are both approaching the throne of grace as redeemed sinners, it works.

Bishop Victoria was asked how she copes when people reject her or her ministry. She replied that rather than look at the faults of others, she looks at herself and asks if she needs to repent, because she knows that she can be as unreasonable as the other person! By recognising how much God loves her, despite her failings, this helps her to be more loving to others who have failings just like she does.