

Notes from the 111th Meeting of Ecclesall Deanery Synod took place at St Paul's Church, Norton Lees on Wednesday 14 June.

Before the Synod began people had the opportunity to look around the revamped St Paul's. Worship was led by the Revd Murray Brown, Vicar of St Paul's who referred to the redevelopment project, both the ups and downs and how it had been important to give to God all the anxiety surrounding it. The key now was to make the project work, encouraging groups and organisations to use the building during the week.

A number of events and issues in the deanery were mentioned:

- 'Shout for Uganda' – Michael Hunter encouraged each church to get involved in the campaign petitioning our Government about the plight of the people of Uganda after 20 years of war and the resulting trauma and neglect.
- Millhouses Midsummer Arts festival takes place Friday 23 – Sunday 25 June. There will be an organ recital on the Friday evening and over the whole weekend an exhibition by local artists including Colin Brown who spoke at the last Synod.
- Endcliffe Methodist Church are holding a Traidcraft Evening 7pm Friday 30 June.
- A World Record attempt Drumming Session on Saturday 8 July at St Mary's Bramall Lane is being organised by Christian Aid and others to highlight the need to continue work towards eradicating world poverty.
- The next session of General Synod is from 5-11 July in York and Jackie encouraged Deanery Synod Reps to visit for the day as Mary Wheatley had done last year.
- Angie Lauener encouraged people to consider going on the Deaneries National Conference (29 September – 1 October) entitled 'Look Over the Wall'. It would be good to have two attend from Ecclesall Deanery.
- It is likely that there will be a Deanery Party in October at Holy Trinity Millhouses.
- Diocesan Synod – there were nine lay nominations for 8 places so an election (by post) needs to take place. The candidates are Susan Ashton, Ian Downing, Barbara Gowing-Scopes, Mark James, Angie Lauener, David Memmott, Andrew Severn, Malcolm Smith, Mary Wheatley. Voting papers must be returned by 29 June.
- Synod said goodbye to Jenny Lee, NSM Curate at Holy Trinity, who will have moved from the Diocese by the time of the next Synod.
- Geoffrey White, currently in St Albans Diocese, will be instituted as Incumbent of St James Norton on 27 September 7.30pm.

Jackie Butcher, Lay Chair of Synod, welcoming Robert Spooner, from ASSIST. Robert spoke to Synod challenging the pre-conceptions and mis-information particularly in certain sections of the press about asylum seekers and refugees. He was accompanied by and Luke

Robert said that the governmental adjudicators seem to wilfully disbelieve the accounts of the asylum seekers/refugees. Children are often held in detention when they have done no wrong. The media distorts the truth and legal help and provision is difficult. People are usually in very desperate circumstances.

The good news is that ASSIST has 80-90 volunteers, the last fund raising concert was a sell out. Individuals give financial aid (recently someone has bought a house for asylum seekers to live in and someone else has offered one rent free) as well as time.

Robert then introduced Asafash from Ethiopia and Luke from Cameroon who shared their very personal and sad testimonies of life in their own country and their experiences once they arrived in the UK. Luke, originally from Cameroon, explained how he was labelled a political troublemaker and had to move from country to country escaping the threat of being enrolled in the army. He went to university and is a journalist by trade. Despite having an international press card the UK officials did not accept that he was a journalist.

Robert then explained how asylum seekers and refugees are referred to ASSIST, how ASSIST decide who they can help and what help is offered. Robert explained that due to the numbers involved, ASSIST had to accept that they can only help the most vulnerable (young, old, pregnant, those sleeping rough, the very ill – often as a result of torture) and have had to develop a points system in order to assess the most needy.

They can only help those not getting Section 4 support. They give cash rather than vouchers (as Section 4 people would have to manage on) and try to provide accommodation. They provide translators and interpreters (often other asylum seekers/refugees and those who have been through the 'system'). ASSIST also provides a most valuable Conversation Club where there are people ready to listen for as long as necessary to the often very complicated and sad stories. These listeners will also assess what help is needed.

Robert ended by encouraging churches to get involved practically and politically by fund raising, volunteering, providing accommodation, befriending (a scheme is run by the Northern Refugee Council), inviting speakers, writing to the MP, having a sign outside church supporting asylum seekers, building links with Mosques, Gudwara's etc and by supporting the City of Sanctuary Campaign.

Jackie thanked Robert, Asafash and Luke; she concluded by saying it is hard to know what to do about a headline but as Christians we know how to treat individuals.

Deanery Website: <http://ecclesalldeanery.org.uk>