



# Giving in Recession

# Bishop David

## Bishop David's address to Synod March 7<sup>th</sup> 2009

In the late 1980's there was a banner headline in the press 'Church Commissioners lose £800 million'. It was a shocking headline and like most headlines it was only partly true. It was the case that the Church Commissioners had lost money; half of it was because the value of their property portfolio had fallen very considerably, but then so had the value of everybody's

home in the whole land. That part of the story was alarmist. But the other part was 'true' - the Church Commissioners had borrowed £400 million to buy land at Ashford in Kent – it was speculative, but because of the downturn in values no building had taken place and so there was a big hole. I understand that in recent years that land has been used for building to good effect and so honour has been restored. But why was this done? Because they were being pressed for more and more money – the Church Urban Fund; to support the church in poor areas and for clergy pensions. And so they took a risk.

I tell that story because it would have been absurd to have this meeting of the Diocesan Synod at this time and not to address the issue which is uppermost in everyone's mind and the constant topic of reporting in the media and in the conversations that all of us have. I tell that story because as a Church we are not immune from some of the root causes of this crisis. And I tell that story because it is with considerable diffidence that I address issue in the Presidential address today.

In the early 1970's one of the first credit cards was 'Access' and some of you will remember their advertising slogan 'Access takes the waiting out of wanting'. I remember preaching a sermon about the wickedness of that slogan. Over the last 18 months and, in particular, since August last year, we have been in the grip of the credit crunch. But whatever you call it, it's a major crisis. Now the Greek word 'crisis' means 'judgement' and we are living in a time of judgement. It is a judgement that we have brought upon ourselves by our reckless behaviour, for at root we have exercised a form of greed for material possessions of astonishing proportions. Don't get me wrong, I'm deeply grateful for my double glazing; for my 2 cars (when they go!) and the rest. Now those things in themselves are fine but it is the acquisitiveness of us, the sheer greed of our behaviour, of our lifestyles, that is the problem. Well, it's more than a problem. It is, in our language as Christians – sin. For sin separates us from God and from each other and this has been the effect of our greed for some considerable time. The gap between the rich and poor is ever widening. The crisis is now showing itself in the unemployment figures; the effect upon our young people; the rise in the wrong and appalling sort of nationalism; crime against property; and a stretching of our already overstretched National Health Service, let alone the consequences of the breakdown in family life, about which every parish priest will have stories to tell, as will the staff of our church schools.

As Christians we need to be very clear that each person is equal and loved by God in exactly the same way. We need to be clear that it is a judgement because the gap between rich and poor is widening. But we need to find some way of letting our voice be heard and has to be a new way forward. That we don't just try and get through the



credit crunch as best we may and then go back to our old ways, hoping it won't happen again – it will, unless we change.

I'm grateful to be part of a Church which is, not just interested in its own internal issues, many of those that there are, but is constantly involved in the public scene. This may be 'invisibly' as small groups of Christians help asylum seekers, or it may be very publicly, as our bishops constantly raise issues in the House of Lords. The Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Archbishops' Council recently produced a most helpful document for General Synod and the implications of the financial crisis and the recession.

In it, it asks if the way forward may be to try and find a new moral consensus in this nation and that that might be built round our understanding of fairness, generosity and sustainability. Those words are not churchy words, but are straightforward words, and should appeal to the better side of human nature. Let us raise our voices where we can in this way.

But we will also be wanting to do something practical right where we are. Mission in the Economy\* has produced a useful leaflet for those facing redundancy and the Church of England website has a straightforward leaflet of commonsense advice, practical actions and prayers.

The churches of this diocese have multiple links into the communities they serve and will be well placed to respond to the situations in which they find themselves. All of this is important and needs to be attended to.

But as the report itself says "Perhaps it is by its words and actions under God, that the Church will help the nation to articulate the sort of society it wishes to be", as the human institutions on which we have depended are proved, again, to be flawed and fallible".

Jesus calls us all to be salt and light in the world. There is no better time than now to be that salt and that light to a new and better way of being than what we have at present.

*\*This talk was given by the Bishop to synod on 7<sup>th</sup> March. The leaflet referred to is part of Diocesan material available on the diocesan website [www.liverpool.anglican.org](http://www.liverpool.anglican.org) and accessible through Giving in Grace. [www.givinginGrace.org](http://www.givinginGrace.org). It features a range of biblical and practical material for churches wishing to take action on giving and the Diocesan web site which signposts resources and case studies in connection with a range of practical actions which churches can take to address the issue of personal debt, budgeting and giving to bless those struggling with money in our congregations and our communities.*

