

RICHMOND AND BARNES DEANERY SYNOD
praying together, learning together, working together

Tuesday 6th February 2024 – 7.30 pm

At ST MARY'S, BARNES

MINUTES

- 1 Opening prayers led by Rev James Hutchings.
- 2 Hymn – Be Still for the Presence of the Lord.
- 3 Introduction and welcome by Rev Alex Barrow.
- 4 Minutes of the last meeting were approved with a minor correction.
- 5 "How should Christians think and pray about the current situation in Israel and Palestine?" – a discussion and forum with the Rt Revd Lord Harries, former Bishop of Oxford, and writer Rhidian Brook.

The full forum may be listened to [here](#) and is summarized below:

Bishop Richard Harries reflected on the current conflict in Gaza by considering both sides and cautioning us to be critical of all the news stories emerging. He looked at the wider background with the following points:

- As Christians, we cannot be indifferent to the safety of Israel.
- The Jewish claim to the land is longstanding, not just a response to the Holocaust.
- The establishment of the state of Israel resulted in an injustice to the Palestinian people, who have suffered grievously ever since.

Rhidian Brook has just spent a year at St George's College, Jerusalem, as artist in residence and spoke about his time there and the people he encountered. He acknowledged that the meeting was in part a response to 7th October but also to understand the before and to try and think what might happen in the future and ask what can we do? Although it is tempting to look away from the conflict, as Christians we don't have an option to do that. He noted that during his time there, people felt that something was going to happen, and it was quite a tumultuous time. He observed that Israel and Palestine are not two clearly distinct societies - a polygon rather than a binary place. Even though he lived in an Anglican Christian and largely Palestinian community whilst out there, he worked hard to travel and to meet others in other parts of society.

He spoke about the people he met who were working hard to build bridges between communities who are finding it hard to continue their work now. He acknowledged that people like these are the future of Israel – “living stones”. He commented that as well as the physical war, a war of words has also erupted which is equally violent and dangerous. Moral outrage needs run its course and turn into moral vision. We need to know the context and history of the situation if we are to pray and think about it.

How do we respond and how do we pray? Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said, “if only you knew the things that made for peace” (Luke 19:42). What are the things that made for peace? – our knowledge and understanding, work hard to address your own prejudices, look at your response to the violence. We can be peacemakers. Understanding informs our prayers. Look at the Psalms.

Rhidian concluded with a prayer that he’d written on a bus coming back from church in the West Bank. The IDF had boarded the bus demanding to see all passports. Two people had left theirs in Jerusalem and the people were held at gunpoint for an hour until they could prove their nationality. The prayer and context can be viewed [here](#).

Questions and comments from the floor were invited:

How should we pray? The politics is immensely complicated and difficult and we should not be telling Israel how to defend itself. We should pray for a change of heart on all sides.

RH: The politics is complex but the prayer is simple: pray for an end to the killing and an establishment of a true and just lasting peace.

How do the Muslim Palestinians view the Christian Palestinians and do the Jews have a different view of Palestinians who are Muslim as opposed to those who are Christians?

RB: Differences between West Bank and Gaza Muslim Palestinians. Not sure how they felt towards Christian Palestinians. The Christian Palestinians Rhidian met felt more under pressure from Israel than the Muslims. Go on what he saw there didn’t seem to be that much difference if you were Israeli in the way you viewed a Palestinian Muslim or Christian. There are very few Christian Palestinians and the congregation is shrinking. *What about the refugees?*

RB: Visited Aida Camp in Bethlehem. A tough space. Refugees have been there for three generations and don’t want to lose their right of return so will not give up their refugee status. The camp suffers and is targeted as it’s seen as a place where terrorism is hot housed. Again, it is a complex situation and requires great patience to get to the place of understanding. There are many hurt and traumatized groups of people living side by side. It will require something extraordinary for peace to come out of this.

There doesn't seem to be an adequate protection for Israel to exist, even though the UN declared it in 1948. Our prayer should be that Israel can exist without fear of elimination from the surrounding countries. The conflict is deep rooted and long standing.

RH: On the contrary, the Western states in particular our own government have been very supportive of Israel and the right of Israel to defend itself even the focus has been on the suffering in Gaza. Nobody doubts that Hamas is an atrocious organization and must not be allowed to exist. There has been no sympathy for Hamas, just support for Israel at the same time as sympathy for the suffering in Gaza.

The longer our government supplies arms to Israel, the longer the conflict will continue. The money could be better spent on creating justice rather than warfare.

What responsibility do companies and investors have in companies involved in the West Bank that maybe facilitating the expansion of settlements. What is the best role a company or investor can take when operating in such an area?

RH: We should take our ethical considerations into account.

RB: The state of Israel is different from the government who is running it. Whilst fervently supporting Israel's right to exist but not the way the government is operating. How do you change the fact that those holding the guns at the moment are extremists? How do we change hearts?

Why has UN resolution 242, requiring Israel to hand back places seized in the Six-Day War, never been in force? Why is favouring a two-state solution regarded as being anti-semitic?

RH: Not heard about the latter. Regarding UN resolution 242, who would the land be handed back to when there is no Palestinian state. The establishment of a Palestinian state has already been mapped out on paper, so it is not impossible.

RB: On talking to locals, some favour one state where everybody just lives together. This and other ideas challenge the idea that the two-state solution is the only solution.

Rev Alex Barrow concluded by offering prayers for the peace of Jerusalem and for God's wisdom. He thanked Bishop Richard and Rhidian.

6 Recommendation to support Operation Forgiveness with previously pledged Deanery Funds

It was agreed at the Deanery Synod on 27th January 2020, that £1,000 of Deanery funds should be allocated to the Knife Crime appeal. At that time the appeal was to raise funds to fund a knife bin for five years to be placed somewhere in the Diocese where it would be most needed. After many years of working with the Diocese, we were unable to find a suitable location for the bin. The Diocese put us in touch with Operation Forgiveness, an early intervention knife-crime initiative, delivered by local churches to local schools. We believe this is a suitable alternative beneficiary of the previously pledged Deanery funds. The Deanery Knife Crime appeal also raised funds from churches within the Deanery. The

Churches that pledged funds have been contacted individually and have indicated their wishes which have been carried out and are unaffected by this resolution.

The above resolution was proposed and passed.

7 Southwark Vision 2024-2035

More details of the Southwark Vision can be found [here](#). Rev Alex Barrow commended this as something Deanery Synod members should bring to the attention of their PCCs.

8 Eco Deanery Update

Suzie O'Brien reflected on a recent experience at St Luke's when tried to raise some funds for buildings transition work and found it quite difficult. Despite grants being available, it seems difficult if you're not in a historic church or an area of need. Considerable time and effort are needed for grant applications which may not come to fruition. Please can we work together and share our learning from fundraising efforts.

Resources available:

[Church of England webinars on getting to net zero](#) are a great resource and you can watch recordings of these. In particular "Funding from Faith-Based Grant Makers" which took place on 9th November.

[Greener Fairer Banking Guide](#) – considers CAF Bank, the Co-operative Bank, Reliance Bank and Unity Trust Bank and how to make switch easily.

Upcoming Events

[No Faith in Fossil Fuels Prayer Vigil](#) outside Westminster from 14th-24th February.

[Lent Climate Pilgrimage Walks](#) – Judith Russenberger is leading the Kingston to Merton leg of Saturday 24th February.

[Climate Chat in Church](#) at St Luke's, Kew on Tuesday 19th March, 7:45pm - 9:30pm.

Family Bike Ride in the Summer

Kew Eco Fair in 2025.

We welcome ideas and suggestions from everyone for eco work that we can do together. Can we advocate together as a Deanery?

Please get in touch if you have suggestions, or if you would like to lead an initiative.

9 Area Dean's Notices

The Rev Canon Dr Ann Nickson retired from Team Rector for Mortlake and East Sheen on 31st January.

The Rev Canon Nick Jepson-Biddle will be licensed as Associate Priest of St Anne's, Kew and Director of the Kew Institute for Theology and Gardening on Sunday 11th February.

Address by the Right Reverend Dr Martin Gainsborough, Bishop of Kingston

Bishop Martin is working his way around the Deanery Synods to introduce himself.

He would like to signal that he will be alongside parishes, schools and chaplaincies in their mission and ministry. Please invite him to your events and services.

Bishop Martin is lead Bishop for the environment in Southwark and part of the National Church Environment Working Group. He acknowledges the challenges facing as they work towards net zero. Do feedback your challenges so that we can overcome these together.

10 The meeting closed with the Grace.

The next meetings of the Deanery Synod will be on

Wednesday 22nd May 2024 – St Anne's, Kew

Monday 30th September 2024 – St Richard's, Ham