

## THE SOCIETY AND FORWARD IN FAITH

### Address to the Society in the Diocese of Chichester, 23 January

by Dr Colin Podmore

I'm going to concentrate on one of the leaflets that I have brought with me – the one that has The Society on one side and Forward in Faith on the other. That's rather symbolic, because The Society and Forward in Faith are two sides of the same coin – or in this case, two sides of the same leaflet. The Society and Forward in Faith are the same group of people, arranged in two different ways for two different sets of purposes.

#### The Society

Let's start with The Society. What is it? Well, it is an 'ecclesial community'. In plain English, it is like a church. Its *raison d'être* is, as the 'strapline' says, 'providing ministry, sacraments and oversight that we can receive with confidence'. More fully:

- It promotes and maintains catholic teaching and practice within the Church of England
- It guarantees a ministry in the historic, apostolic succession and a true sacramental life, by commending Priests of The Society whose sacramental ministry can be received with confidence.
- It provides episcopal oversight for priests and parishes.

In almost every diocese the parishes come under that oversight by passing a resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration. They do so because they want a bishop with whom they will be in full communion because they can receive the ministry of all the priests whom that bishop ordains. Here, you are fortunate to have a diocesan bishop with whom you are in full communion, but it is important still to pass that resolution now. Bishop Martin could be taken from you at any time.

That theology of full communion is set out more fully in a second leaflet, 'Communion and Full Communion'. I'm not going to say much about it now, but please study it and discuss it. The full communion of the Church involves communion between communities that celebrate the Eucharist, with teaching and ministry that can be recognized as catholic and apostolic. It is the ministry of a bishop that unites these eucharistic communities in full communion with each other and with churches headed by other bishops. The Society is a structure of full communion which unites the bishops that oversee these parishes and thus unites the parishes. It is like a church.

Any parish that is under a bishop of The Society can affiliate to The Society. They receive a porch-card which proclaims their identity as a parish of The Society. They are listed on the Society website. In this diocese parishes have been very restrained in affiliating to The Society. So far there are just four Society parishes in this diocese. I hope we'll soon have many more. The affiliation form is on the Society website – look for Parish Affiliation in the 'About Us' section.

The Society is led by a Council of Bishops. That's important. The Society is like a church and the Church is not a democracy. The fact that the catholic bishops of the Church of England are now working together so closely and meeting together for overnight meetings

three times a year is a huge step forward. Their leadership, teaching and pastoral guidance are building up our common life.

In each diocese the Bishop's Representative assists the Society bishop in the task of oversight, and helps the parishes to pass the resolution that will deliver it. Again, you are lucky here that your Society bishop is in the diocese (and indeed there are four retired bishops of The Society, so this one diocese has one quarter of the Society bishops!). But in many dioceses the Society lives some way away. It is therefore very helpful that his Representative is among the parishes and people on the spot. From the Resources area of the website you can download the Society branding. That branding is copyright and must only be used by parishes that are affiliated to The Society and for diocesan events and initiatives that are approved by the Bishop's Representative. We must protect the brand.

The most important message I have for you today is the one that is mentioned at the bottom of page 2 of the leaflet. The Society is not a membership organization. Let me repeat that, because it seems to be a difficult message to get across: **The Society is not a membership organization.** There is no membership list, there is no subscription, no removing members from the list for non-payment. The fundamental reason for that is the nature of The Society. From the outset the bishops were clear that it was going to be an ecclesial community – like a church, not like a pressure group or a club. Admission to the Church is by baptism, confirmation and communion, not by signing a form or paying a subscription, so the same is true of The Society. If you are a baptized Christian and receive communion in a church that is under the oversight of a bishop of The Society, you are a member of The Society, without signing anything or paying anything. The Society is not a membership organization. We must move on from the world of campaigns and pressure groups into being the Church.

## **Forward in Faith**

This is the moment to turn over and look at the other side of the leaflet, about Forward in Faith. Forward in Faith is not like a church, led by bishops. It is a democratically-structured membership organization. It has its beliefs and aims, and those are set out here. But let's look at the bullet points to find out what Forward in Faith does.

If The Society is like a church, it will have the same problems as the Church. One of those problems is that people think that because you don't have to pay a subscription to belong, it is all free and it doesn't cost anything. But it does. So just in the same way that we have to get people to pay regularly for the cost of running their parish church, even though it isn't a membership organization, so we have to persuade people to contribute towards the cost of running The Society. We could have set up a new registered charity, perhaps called 'Friends of The Society', with the whole panoply of bank accounts, auditors, annual accounts, but we didn't. The Catholic Movement already has too many charitable membership organizations. And we already have a charitable membership organization, the purpose of which is precisely, according to its constitution, to seek an ecclesial structure that provides a ministry that we can receive with confidence. It's called Forward in Faith. Thousands of people have standing orders paying subscriptions to a charity called Forward in Faith. If we set up a new charity with a different name, even leaving aside all the work that that would involve, which we simply haven't got time for, and all the duplication, we'd have to ask them all to take out new standing orders to the new charity. The result could only be a massive loss of income which we can't afford. But whether it would be desirable is a debate we don't need to have: it simply isn't practical.

It has also sometimes be suggested that we should change the name 'Forward in Faith'. There are half a dozen reasons why that would be a very bad idea:

- We have 'brand recognition' of which others can only dream. Recently a Church Times headline mentioned 'FiF'. How many other organizations are so well-known that their acronym can be put in a headline? It would be crazy to lose that.
- It would look as if we lacked confidence.
- It would lead to a distracting debate about names, and the precedents are not good. Someone thought it would be a good idea to take the Gospel out of USPG. Now it is all about 'Us'. Someone even suggested to me that Forward in Faith should become 'Forward'; I replied that I will not go down in history as the Director who took the Faith out of Forward in Faith.
- Changing the name would be a kick in the teeth to those who supported Forward in Faith through all those years of campaigning for provision. Without them we would not be here now. Tony Blair did something similar by trying to re-name 'Labour' as 'New Labour'. The gimmick wasn't popular and it didn't last.
- About £100,000 is paid each year into bank accounts called 'Forward in Faith' belonging to a charity called 'Forward in Faith', and people have left money to Forward in Faith in their wills. We would lose money and it would cost money.
- We have re-branded Forward in Faith with a new logo and design. We have a new website with that logo and design, a Facebook page with almost 1,000 'likes' with that design, and we have published a book and leaflets with it. If I were instructed to bin three years' work and start again, I would have to resign.

What we are doing, in addition to the new look for a new era that we have introduced, is to 're-inhabit' the brand. Forward in Faith is us. If people think that the Bishop of Wakefield (our Chairman), Jonathan Prichard (our Treasurer) and I (as Director) are 'toxic', I cannot help them. We simply have to be who we are and ask people to judge us by who we are and what we do and say, and not live in the past. We are getting good and positive publicity. We need to stay with the strategy that we adopted three years ago, and have confidence in it.

**So Forward in Faith is the membership structure that finances and supports The Society** – to use another analogy, if The Society is the diocese, Forward in Faith is the Diocesan Board of Finance. Last January we held a training day for all the bishops' representatives in London. Who paid for it? Forward in Faith. In February we posted a pack of booklets and leaflets to 500 parishes to help them pass the new resolution. Who paid for the printing and the postage? Forward in Faith. Who paid for the websites and the branding? Forward in Faith. As a full-time staff member, I sit in an office in London and give advice to the bishops, the bishops' representatives, parish clergy and churchwardens. I act as the Secretary of the Council of Bishops, service their meetings and carry forward their initiatives. Who pays my salary? Forward in Faith. I could go on, but I think you get the picture. Being a member of Forward in Faith is like being part of the planned giving arrangement in your parish church: whether you do it with envelopes or standing orders, you are on a list, and you get onto that list by signing something. Everyone who is baptized and worships in your parish church is a member of the church, but only some of them are on the list of regular payers.

Going on down the list, Forward in Faith supports parishes that have passed a resolution. It does that with information and advice, and not least in employing me to give that advice. The

leaflets about passing resolutions, our advice booklet and so on are all on the Forward in Faith website. It's all a bit too political for The Society.

Thirdly, and very importantly, Forward in Faith monitors the operation of the House of Bishops' Declaration and makes regular reports to the Independent Reviewer – the ombudsman who steps in when someone breaches the Declaration. The Society is like a church and led by Bishops. The bishops of The Society are not going to be engaged in complaining about other bishops. That's not the sort of thing that churches do. But Forward in Faith, which as well as being a support structure is also a political and campaigning organization will step forward and do that. We've already done that once – when the Bishop of Tewkesbury, running the Diocese of Gloucester during the recent vacancy, licensed a women priest to all the parishes of a benefice even though one of them had a Resolution in force. It was Forward in Faith that raised this as a complaint, and our complaint was upheld by the Reviewer.

Then the fourth point on the list. Now that we have won the provision for which we've been fighting all these years, campaigning will be a much smaller part of our work in future. But we do need to support the Catholic Group in General Synod, and we campaigned for a strong catholic representation in the next General Synod. To that end Forward in Faith appointed Anne Gray as our full-time Elections Officer for the twelve months leading up to the synodical elections. It paid off, with a larger and re-juvenated Catholic Group.

Related to this political representation in the General Synod is another point not mentioned in the leaflet. We need to continue, gently and patiently but also clearly and audibly, to explain why we cannot receive the ministry of women as bishops and priests. If we don't explain that, we will have no right to any provision, because the provision responds to a theological conviction. And if we don't continue to explain our views on this, no one in future generations will want or need any provision. We must keep talking about this, even though we must all talk about other things as well. Forward in Faith has published a leaflet about it, there are links to other material on the website, and we have published a book (Fathers in God?) which is available from the office (please send a cheque for £12 payable to Forward in Faith). This is another aspect of Forward in Faith's continuing political work.

If you turn over the page you'll see the heading 'Governance', which explains the roles of the National Assembly, the Council and the Executive Committee. This relates back to the first thing I mentioned. Forward in Faith is not only a registered charity, raising, holding and spending the money and employing the staff. It is also a democratically structured membership organization. If the Society is like the parish church, where all baptized Christians have membership rights because of their baptism, Forward in Faith is like the electoral roll, where you have voting rights because you have signed up.

The Society isn't democratically structured. It is led by a Council of Bishops, who have an office of teaching and pastoral guidance by virtue of their ordination as bishops and the episcopal sees that they occupy. But the bishops need to consult representatives of the clergy and laity of The Society, and this they do through the structures of Forward in Faith. Of the eight members of the Council of Bishops, no fewer than six are also members of the Forward in Faith Council, where they meet with the elected representatives of the movement and also key leaders such as the Provincial Master of the Society of the Holy Cross and the Chairman of the Catholic Group. The statements on communion and catholicity that the bishops published last year are a case in point. The Forward in Faith Council asked the bishops to do

this. The bishops prepared a draft and then consulted the Forward in Faith Council about it, and then the bishops finalized the text.

The Forward in Faith Council is elected by the National Assembly, which consists mostly of representatives of the registered parishes, the branch chairmen, and representatives of those branch members who are not in registered parishes. Society parishes are able to tick a box in order to be a Forward in Faith registered parish as well, for no extra charge, and that enables their representatives to play their part in the National Assembly.

### **The Society and Forward in Faith**

So there you have it: two sides of the same leaflet – two sides of a coin. We are a single community with, if you like, different flags to fly. In each diocese there is a Bishop's Representative. In almost every diocese there is also a Forward in Faith branch. Whether diocesan events have a Society branding or a Forward in Faith branding will depend on the nature of the event: is it an 'ecclesial' event or a 'political' event? If it's a chrism mass or a eucharist, or a spiritual retreat, it will be a Society occasion. If it's a political gathering, or a meeting to plan synodical elections, or blowing a whistle when the diocese does things that are out of order, it's Forward in Faith. If it's a fundraising event, paying for election campaigns for example, it's Forward in Faith. If it's a group of people sitting at the feet of their bishop to be taught, it's The Society, but if it's a democratic committee of clergy and laity, it's Forward in Faith.

If we are the same people and we all work together, it will work. What would be absolutely disastrous, and must not happen, is different people keeping different lists of overlapping people and holding rival events. The Society is not a membership organization; the membership organization that supports The Society is Forward in Faith. We must get that simple message across, work with the two brands, and use both of them to the best advantage.

### **Money and Membership**

My job is to make sure that Forward in Faith can bear the weight of its new tasks – supporting The Society, our bishops and our parishes, monitoring the operation of the Declaration, supporting the Catholic Group, campaigning and propaganda. For all of this, we need a firm financial base. Unfortunately, Forward in Faith is running at a very large deficit in terms of normal annual expenditure and income. We now need to get expenditure and income in line. In 2013 the gap was £160,000. In 2014 we got that down to £95,000. Let me repeat that – an annual deficit of £95,000. Fortunately, two very generous donations totalling £95,000 in each of the last three years have kept us in the black. But there is no guarantee that those donations will be repeated, and that represents a very real risk for our future. We must reduce the deficit and stand increasingly on our own feet. There are two ways of doing that: we are reducing expenditure significantly, but we must also raise our income. The minimum subscription for those who aren't in certain categories is £30 a year. But could you afford to add a donation? Could you give one pound a week, for example (£50 a year)? Could you give £10 a month (much the same as the cost of buying a Sunday newspaper each week)? Some people are responding generously, and I'm hoping that others will follow their example.

The key to getting the finances straight is recruiting new members. The fewer we have, the greater the share of the cost that each must bear. Between 2010 and 2013 our membership fell rapidly. The Ordinariate took its toll, but now, overwhelmingly, the reason for decline is old

age, illness and death. The good news is that we are now recruiting as many members as we lose through death and old age. But we are only standing still. Stopping the decline is not enough: we've got to do much better, and regain the ground we've lost in recent years.

It isn't that the Catholic Movement is declining any more than the Church of England is overall. We just live in an age in which people are very reluctant to join anything. In the 1950s the Conservative Party had half a million members. In 2005 it had a quarter of a million. The last time I looked it had just 134,000. The number almost halved in eight years. Millions of people still vote Conservative, but only a fraction of them are willing to join the party. Until the last few months the Labour picture was the same.

So we face a challenge. **The most important thing that any of us can do for the Catholic Movement or for The Society is to recruit a new member for Forward in Faith.** If each of our members recruited just one new member, we'd double our numbers and we'd be able to fund our core work from our membership, we could spend the legacies we receive (and please do think about a making a bequest in your will) on what they should be spent on (one-off expenditure, special projects, mission and growth). I could spend more of my time on the real work of building our future and less on keeping the ship afloat. Members are won by personal contact – by conversations and nagging. Is there someone in your church whom you might persuade to join Forward in Faith and share the burden?

As I've said, this *is* about money, because the more members we have, the more income we'll have, and the less we'll have to rely on a few remarkably generous donors, living and dead. But it's also about refreshing our movement with a new generation of young and vigorous members to fly the flag when those of us whose hair is already grey have finally put our feet up. So please may I appeal to each one of you: **if you are not a member, please join Forward in Faith. If you are a member, please take the form away and recruit just one other person as a new member. If you remember nothing else from this talk, please remember that. It is crucial for our future.**