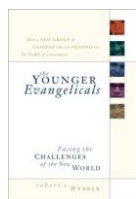


Learning from our forefathers: maintaining the heritage

A century of evangelical witness
in the Diocese of Chichester

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1 Learning from history



It has been commented that ‘there is little in history that is not liable to repetition’ – this message stands out of the pages of the minutes of the Chichester evangelical committee over the decades. As incoming secretary it was crucial to gain a sense of the history of such an important movement in the Diocese. As Robert E Webber comments in ‘The Younger Evangelicals’, one of the characteristics of evangelicals at the turn of the 21st Century is a desire to engage with history: both of evangelicalism and all that is Godly in church tradition. It appeared important to know where the CDEU had come from and what had forged its past in order to gain a sense of where the future may be heading.

Learning from history is not the only message to take from the minute books. Reading through a century of records it becomes clear that several themes run throughout.

- First, there is a desire for evangelicals to meet together and support one another.
- Secondly, that this support is within the Church of England and supportive of the Diocese of Chichester in the spread and maintenance of the Gospel.
- Third, that many have over the decades committed themselves selflessly to ensuring the maintenance of the Faith for the next generation of church leaders to take on.
- Fourthly, that unity means meeting together and that the Union has never been afraid of making changes to ensure that this occurs.
- In the end, just as God works always for those who love Him (Rom 8:28), there is a reoccurring theme of a heritage that runs through the centuries of the Church and a passion stirred in for Christ, in Christ, in this Diocese.

2 Nine men meeting in Eastbourne: 1910



When I was passed the CDEF minute books by Martin Grieg, the outgoing secretary, the huge box of information gave little indication of the story within. Files, folders, papers, publicity, annual meeting notes and financial statements overflowed from the box. One folder was full of current correspondence within the Diocese. Another related to the overall Evangelical Council of the Church of England (CEEC). A smaller folder gave details of various speakers and meetings over the past thirty years. Tucked at the bottom of the box were two huge leather bound volumes and one smaller red hard covered exercise book. The copper plate handwriting revealed that these were where to begin. The desire to scan for information soon gave way to immersion in issues and needs, theological intrigues and the concerns of the people of God of a past age and their struggle to come together.

This can be seen from the very first meeting of a small group of men in 1910 at **Holy Trinity Eastbourne**. The aim was to form a bridge to work together for the good of the Gospel and for the good of the Diocese. One of the main objectives of this inaugural gathering was 'to establish a bond of union between the Evangelical Clergy of the Diocese... to act together in any case of special need... closer touch.... better make their influence felt'. This can be seen in the minutes where there was agreement that 'the work would be carried on quietly. It would be constructive rather than controversial... thoroughly loyal...to our Church and to our Evangelical Cause'. Fifty years before Stott's keynote address at Keele in 1967, evangelicals of Chichester Diocese were affirming their belief in positive engagement from within the Church of England.

As is still the case, from the outset the focus of evangelical activity in the Diocese was both working together and constructive dialogue. To achieve this aim, these Evangelical Clergy were willing to 'sink minor differences...realising that Evangelicalism should stand for all that is truest and best in the Church'. Again, such a willingness to work together is far in advance of the 1995 recommendations of the AEA 'At AEA 1995 the dangers of fragmentation were recognised and all Evangelical Anglicans were urged for the sake of the Gospel to work for greater trust and better communications...even when disagreeing... (and) be actively committed to the DEF/DEUs'.

3 From a storm in a teacup to too many evangelical groups: 1910-1940



It would be tempting to see this small group of nine, with apologies from a further six, as nothing more than a pre World War I storm in a teacup. What could a mere handful of people achieve at a time when they were concerned over the manner of an ordination at Chichester Cathedral (1912), baptism (1913) and evening communion (1912) or admitting non-Anglicans to Communion (1914)?

However, within a few years a newspaper report of the first major gathering undertaken by the group notes that it was ‘a gathering of an interesting and somewhat unique character’. It goes on to report that four hundred people attended with the aim of getting to know others. What seems to amaze the reporter is that lay people were invited to take part – ‘even in the discussions’.

Between 1910 and the 1930s discussion centred on spiritual vitality, fellowship with other churches and the need for a united approach to changes in the Diocese and its funding of clergy. Over this period a pattern emerged of an annual meeting with a mixture of local and national speakers. The issues covered ranged from action, with 1926’s focus on ‘Mission’, to looking inwards with the Archdeacon of Macclesfield speaking on ‘Our Need of Unity at this Crisis’.



The crisis was the revision of the Prayer Book and the publicity beforehand seemed to be aware of the need to be constructive whatever was decided, with comments like ‘the need to look ahead with wisdom and caution’. In 1935 the address again centred on evangelical unity while around this time other meetings looked at ‘Paganism and ‘Modernism’. In this period the impression gained is that of a shift in focus: that engagement with a changing world was now as important as defence of issues at the core of doctrine and ecclesiology. This probably reflects the fact that by the 1930s the evangelical voice was recognised and accepted within the Diocese. By 1932, after a period of what the committee perceived as hostility by some in the Diocese, the Bishop of Chichester accepted an invitation to chair the afternoon session of the annual meeting in Eastbourne. Warm correspondence between the Bishop of Chichester and the committee in 1937 seems to support this evolving understanding. It is interesting that this correspondence reveals 60 evangelical clergy standing together over a number of issues – from concern over reserved sacrament to the nature of a Diocesan call for daily services throughout the week.

4 That little red book: the 1950s



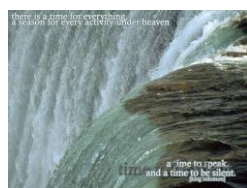
There are no records of the clergy based evangelical committee between 1946-1957. However, the small red exercise book takes up this period with the minutes of the lay committee of the evangelical group. According to a note by the incoming secretary, Mr Wheeler, the lay committee had not met during WW II, but had a history stretching back well before 1940. It would seem that this committee had existed alongside the clergy committee for many years.

Where this exercise book takes up the record; by 1945, the lay and clergy committees were increasingly overlapping towards becoming the joint planning group. At some points in the book the minutes are of the joint group, at other times it is the lay members only, or occasionally, a record of one of the new branch groups that were formed at this time who are meeting.

These notes continue in the same vein of the reporter in 1912, that lay people were seen as central to the movement. There is clearly equality of voice for all in the meetings with both men and women represented on the committee, although overwhelmingly there is a male predominance numerically. Subjects covered range from annual conferences to elections to the house of laity and revision of canon law. What appears to give focus to the committee is summarised in the 1945 minutes of the Lay Committee, a meeting held at **a restaurant in Lewes**. Mr Bowerman of **Littlehampton** commented that other church traditions are 'united, and said that in his opinion there were already too many evangelical societies'.

5 Evangelicals going public: 1950-1970

The last entry referring to Canon Warner, secretary of the committee since the 1920s, is mentioned in 1947. This is a call to a greater public awareness of the evangelical group by providing notices to all incumbents willing to give space to them and naming local members of the evangelical union. As at the outset of the group in 1910, concern is expressed that these flyers should not be used in a way that would be offensive to Anglo Catholic incumbents and should only be used 'where incumbents were sympathetic'. The next committee meeting was held straight after Canon Warner's funeral, something the Canon would no doubt have approved as the work of evangelical unity and voice was central to his work over so many decades.



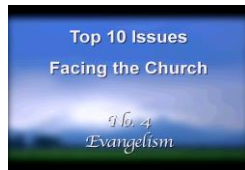
The desire to widen the evangelical voice in the Diocese continued through the late 1940s. In 1948 a newsletter was advocated. In 1950 the details of a quarterly bulletin were agreed, but no action was taken. The idea was for material to come from practice already in use in evangelical parishes, gained from collecting past parish magazines. These two items reappear as a subject of discussion in the minutes of 2004! in reflection of the truth of the writer of Ecclesiastes that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. In 1949 the annual conference was moved to a Saturday and a third, evening, address was added to the programme.

Around 1950 most of the records centre on internal issues of organisation, membership, identity and affiliation. Discussion of Diocesan committees, their focus, relevance and establishing a membership base figure prominently. Key conference addresses in the early 1950s included a new vision of the world's need and a new vision of responsibility as evangelicals. Children and youth work are mentioned for the first time as areas for debate. With all this activity, willingness to engage with publicity and a sense of a house that is in good order it is interesting to see that in 1952 the treasurer, Mr Wheeler, reported that no evangelical churches had paid a subscription that year.

It is not until 1957 that the term 'Evangelical Union' is recorded in the minutes. It appears in the context of a letter of welcome to the then Bishop of Wakefield on his nomination as the next Bishop of Chichester. The Bishop was also to be invited to the annual conference. At this time there is further internal reorganisation as the committee discusses the nature of this annual meeting. Should it be by invitation only or by delegate per church? Would instruction, addressing controversial issues or devotion be the most effective use of the time? Not for the first time, the question of forming a membership base came up.

By the early 1960s the debate was over a perceived need for a clergy-focused summer conference. The reasoning for this change was not to isolate the laity. In fact, in 1960, a review of the past minutes was held by the then secretary, F.G. Kerr-Dineen, which revealed to the Evangelical Union the need for a formal policy of both clerical and lay membership and that precise boundaries were less important than getting the committee active and fully operational. The reason for a clergy only gathering was a desire to strengthen evangelical action in the Diocese because clergy needed to talk with peers about 'experimental baptism and confirmation services'. To ensure parity between clergy and laity, regional conferences

were set up at this time. Reflecting this parity, a note in 1961 states 'all felt an urgent need to rally Evangelicals and make their contribution really felt in Church matters'. This led to a threefold conference programme developing of clerical only, a regional conference and a general conference of representatives across the Diocese.



Reflecting the continued acceptance of the Evangelical Union locally, in the 1960s the committee noted that the new Bishop of Chichester had taken points raised on evangelism to heart. The annual conference looked at evangelism, following a theme from ten years before on 'evangelism in both town and countryside'. Conversion, reconciliation, Holy Communion, the Prayer Book and Guilt were areas explored at this time. With clergy only at these, it was noted that attendance picked up – 45 came in 1961 and over 60 in 1964. It would appear that for many the themes were of secondary importance to the opportunity to meet other clergy; 'there was no doubt that there was great value in the very fact of the clergy gathering...in fellowship and discussion.' (1961).

The Union was also aware of developments within the Diocese. From the late 1950s onwards the Evangelical Union seems to have acted as a pivotal mouthpiece of evangelical voice, fostering communication and increasingly mutual understanding with those of an Anglo Catholic position. One example would be the Union making a report to the Bishop of Chichester on Anglican-Methodist Unity, which seems to have been received positively. Another is the way the Union reaffirmed the invitation to non-Anglicans to Holy Communion.

When a High Mass took place in Brighton the Committee made representations to the effect that this was not an Anglican practice. In 1970, with Pastoral Measure changes there was concern that those in a minority position within the Diocese, namely parishes 'historically evangelical', could come under pressure in some circumstances. The Union resolved to ensure that there was fairness for all in the new system. The lack of partisanship in this discussion is evident in the language recorded: the committee seemed willing to speak out for justice for anyone in a compromised situation whatever the churchmanship. No mention of their ever having to act on this agreement is evident. In 1978, the Union supported the Diocese in developing greater links with Roman Catholic speakers at events.



Readiness to adapt to changing circumstances is shown in 1967 when the committee found 'that the present system was inefficient and not nearly as effective as it should be. The time (has) come for complete re-organisation with special consideration about place of laity.' This resulted in the formation of major regional committees to develop regional meetings. These regional, and the lay focused annual conferences, had been intermittent until this point and taken a few years to get under way. After this revision, the minutes state that 'about 130 people attended, more than ever before', at **Newick**. At this time the CDEU, as it is from now on referred to, reaffirmed its commitment to be evangelical within the life of the Church of England and to support all those in Christian fellowship in the Diocese.

In terms of growth, for the first time since it was discussed in the 1950s a full list is given of membership is given in 1969. From an initial meeting in 1910 of nine people, a group membership of 78 clergy and 54 laity now existed. The committee alone numbered 26 people. As half these laity came from a single church, the message is probably that the clergy number accurately reflects evangelical views in the Diocese, but that even in 1969 there were questions for laity as to what joining the CDEU actually meant, a question also brought up at annual meetings in the early 2000s.

6 From confidence to a time of reflection: 1970 to the present



By the mid 1970s the message of the annual clerical conference was that of confidence: in evangelism, training a new generation of church leaders, developing preaching, communication and training people for discipleship. Recognising the importance and success of these annual meetings it was agreed to include Readers if possible. Regional meetings had a good membership base and varied speakers and discussions. When the new Bishop of Chichester took up his post in 1975 the CDEU were invited to the Palace, an event that the minutes of the next committee record with gratitude in terms of 'warm appreciation'.

In 1977 a new venture was undertaken: a whole day annual conference was held at **St Andrew's School in Crawley**. Changes in the nature of these conferences were also showing in the re-occurring issue of the manner of Holy Communion to be celebrated: Series III or 1662. By 1980 the debate had widened to whether Holy Communion was always appropriate, what constituted a time of worship and why some clergy seemed to leave before Holy Communion was celebrated. Perhaps it was with this in mind that in 1981 the clergy conference looked at the subject of Creative Worship.

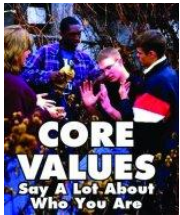
Keeping track with changes in society, by the 1990s the annual meetings had speakers on 'New Age Philosophy' and 'Interfaith-Multi-faith dialogue'. Changes within the Diocese continued to be a subject of discussion, with frequent mention of people from all church traditions to pray for, give thanks for or in some cases, sadly, to offer condolences to over bereavement. The impression is of pastoral caring, mutual respect within evangelicalism and between the CDEU membership and those of a more catholic tradition. When the new Bishop of Horsham was appointed in 1991, the minutes record respect for Bishop Lindsay. At this time members of the Union became involved in evangelism working parties in the Diocese and by the end of the decade several past and present committee members or people recorded in the minutes had taken on Diocesan roles. A sense of inclusion, engagement and at times convergence between the Diocese and aspects of evangelicalism pervades the records.

Orthopraxis

In the early 1990s the need for clear communication between evangelicals was a re-occurring theme, although the reason for this need: whether miss-communication, specific issues or something else, is not indicated. In 1995 the run of regional, clergy and summer meetings came to an end. A fall in clergy affiliation is hinted at but never quantified. All that is stated is that the committee felt that numbers had been falling and it was a stretch to get good speakers to so many events. In response, a single, central meeting was to be held. With the constitution of the CDEU last reviewed in 1972 it was felt that this would be an ideal moment to look at it in the light of current practice.

At this stage, some of the annual meeting titles indicate the focus of the CDEU: 'Finding the cutting edge – using the Bible in the real world', 'Politics – why bother? The Responsibility of a Christian Citizen Today' and 'Worship that Connects', are a few examples. At the same time, issues such as sexuality created discussion within the committee as the members continued to make the evangelical view known.

By the late 1990s a key issue in the minutes seems to be a growing awareness that those attending meetings were 'regulars' (1998). The minutes record an ongoing discussion as to what the CDEU was for, timing of meetings, the realisation that with the 'growth of evangelical practice in the CofE there are now different perceptions of church and the need to meet'. By 2002 the minutes record a consensus that a single event to focus attendance and facilitate evangelical networking would be worth trying. Several minutes record that the very growth of Bible study, worship gatherings, Christian holidays and church away days had created a culture where there was less time for meeting at a Diocesan level – and that many of these were in fact the foundation stones which evangelicals had so long sought to share with others.



In 2004 the minutes record the desire to reaffirm the core values of the original nine men who met in 1910, even though at that time the original minutes had yet to be read and this review was not even conceived.

In 2004 the minutes reaffirm the desire to meet in unity, share together and offer a combined, constructive voice within the Diocese for the future of the whole Church of England, this time by website, gathering annually and by publications. While the methods may change, the message of the Gospel and the evangelical voice remain unchanged, in the words of Quirinus of Siscia, 'worshipping the only true God', standing firm in God's strength (1 Peter 4:11) in a rapidly changing world.

Simon Taylor (2004, adapted slightly 2010)