

# God lends us his ear



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

MY copy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s spiritual classic *Life Together* is dog-eared and falling apart.

*Life Together* explores the character of Christian community. How it is sustained. What breaks it apart. There is much to commend in the book. Here, I want to highlight Bonhoeffer’s luminous reflections on the place of listening in sustaining Christian community.

Before doing so, a word on the context, both his and ours: in the politically dangerous days of late 1930s Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer is speaking to young men preparing for ordination. In a counter-cultural challenge to individualism, self-sufficiency and idealism, Bonhoeffer presents a vision of the Church - life together in Christ - that is authentic, cross-shaped, costly and real about the vocation to a reconciled common life. I believe Bonhoeffer’s thought has much to teach us, both as a diocesan ‘community of communities’ and as profound theological differences threaten to tear apart our life as a national church.

It’s vital not to close our hearts to the contemporary context. As war rages between Russia and Ukraine and violence divides Palestinian and Israeli, it is timely for Christians to reflect on their common life and witness: to make the connections and to think about what being Church

means, within and for a fractious, broken world. For, in Jesus Christ, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1: 20).

So here’s a fragment drawn from one particularly rich passage, on the place of listening in building up the life of the Christian community. “The first service one owes to others in the fellowship”, writes Bonhoeffer, “consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love for us that he not only gives us his Word but also lends us his ear.

“So it is his work we do when we learn to listen... Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because Christians are talking when they should be listening... one who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others...” (SCM Press, fifth edition).

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us re-commit ourselves to the patient, costly work of listening to one another, that our life together might reflect more faithfully the reconciling work of God in Christ, for each one of us and for the whole world.

## @CofEPortsmouth

### SUMMER 2024

#### UPFRONT

- 3 Faith in Focus
- 4-9 Latest news

#### IN DEPTH

- 10-13 Choir Church: using music in evangelism
- 14-17 Local lay ministry: the worshippers trained for work in parishes

#### PEOPLE

- 18-19 My Faith: meet our expert in bioethics
- 20-21 Ordinations: meet two of our 2024 ordinands
- 22-23 My Life: the drug addict whose life was changed
- 24 The Big Issue: history of the Israel-Gaza conflict
- 25 Why I love my church: Holy Rood, Stubbington

#### AND FINALLY

- 26 Top 10: Women priests

**Editor:** Neil Pugmire (023-9289 9673 or [neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org))

**Advertising:** Ian Pilkington (01752-225 623 or [ian@cornerstonevision.com](mailto:ian@cornerstonevision.com))