**To           :              Headteachers; Chairs of Governors; Foundation Governors; Ex-officio clergy; Deputy Headteachers; RE Coordinators**

(and please forward widely to your contacts & networks)

**From     :               Jeff Williams**

**Date      :               14th December 2022**

**Re           :              Fortnightly bulletin and resources from the Diocesan Education Team**

Dear colleagues

Faith, religion, Christianity and the CofE have been featured across the media somewhat since I corresponded with you a mere 14 days ago! Of course, these are not one and the same thing.

On the same day the 2021 National Census report was issued two weeks ago, the main debate online, on tv, radio and in the press, was about who would reach the Number 1 slot in the Christmas Album Charts. The race is on between Stormzy and Cliff – two high profile Christian men.

Stormzy’s previous two albums both reached #1, and his current album, *This is what I mean* like the previous two is full of references to God and faith. Stormzy’s recent TV interview by Louis Theroux was widely acclaimed and watched by massive numbers of people of all ages, closely followed by his hosting of a national radio show with Jo Whiley, again with in depth discussions of what grounds him and ultimately matters in his life. Meanwhile Cliff Richard returns with his festive collection *Christmas With Cliff*. His first dedicated Christmas release in 19 years, it is on course to become Cliff’s 47th Top 10 solo album, in a recording career that now spans over 60 years.

The media soon, however, began commenting on some significant statistics about religious affiliation contained in the Census. In 2021 94.0% (56.0 million) of usual residents answered the voluntary question about faith, an increase from 92.9% (52.1 million) in 2011. For the first time in a census of England and Wales, less than half of the population (46.2%, 27.5 million) described themselves as “Christian” – previously 59.3%  in 2011 and 72% in 2001. Despite this decrease, “Christian” remained the most common response to the religion question. “No religion” was the second most common response, increasing to 37.2% (22.2 million) 25.2% (14.1 million) in 2011 – although the nuances and specifics are complex regarding the meaning of this self-declared title. The 46.2% describing themselves as ‘Christian’ does not mean that 27.5 million people are worshipping in Churches however!

The Archbishop of York responded to the statistics by saying : *“The Christian church exists to share the good news of Jesus Christ, serve our neighbour and bring hope to a troubled world. That’s what we’ve done for 2,000 years - in times of war and peace; hardship and plenty; revival and decline and it’s what we must do now more than ever. It’s not a great surprise that the Census shows fewer people in this country identifying as Christian than in the past, but it still throws down a challenge to us not only to trust that God will build his kingdom on Earth but also to play our part in making Christ known. We have left behind the era when many people almost automatically identified as Christian but other surveys consistently show how the same people still seek spiritual truth and wisdom and a set of values to live by. This winter - perhaps more so than for a long time – people right across the country, some in desperate need, will be turning to their local church, not only for spiritual hope but practical help. We will be there for them, in many cases, providing food and warmth. And at Christmas millions of people will still come to our services. At the same time, we will be looking beyond our immediate surroundings, remembering we are part of a global faith, the largest movement on Earth and its greatest hope for a peaceful, sustainable future.”*

Even more media interest - last week the Church of England published its data on church attendance figures for 2021. The numbers continue a downward trend, with average weekly and average Sunday attendance now being around 600,000 across England. Analysis and detailed breakdown can be easily accessed online.

Some commentators reflected that while there are serious numbers of people who have rejected the title ‘Christian’ and organised, institutional religion, but are not necessarily opposed to faith. At Christmas this becomes even more interesting as thousands of people will attend services in Cathedrals and local churches, many of whom do so only on this single occasion.

While the CofE attendance statistics were being debated*, “poet, author, scholar, and thought by some to be the most talented and intellectual archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams”* was delivering one of the annual Reith Lectures – again, widely publicised. This year the Reith Lectures focused on F.D.Roosevelt’s  four ‘Freedoms’ (Freedom of Speech; Freedom of Worship; Freedom from Fear; Freedom from Want;) and Lord Williams spoke on ‘Freedom of Worship’. It’s a fascinating lecture and I really commend it to you, covering more than Christian worship and wider reflections – easily accessed on BBC Sounds and online. Particularly interesting and relevant to us, is his response to a question from a Humanist after the lecture about compulsory Christian worship in schools leading to comments about the balance between ‘exposure and imposition’ for children. The text of his speech is also available online for those who prefer reading than listening.

Phew – and I haven’t mentioned the ‘Ban the Bishops from The Lords’ debate; today’s letter in the media to the Archbishop of Canterbury about ‘Transgender promotion in Church schools’; or last week’s CofE’s statement about academisation! I’ve also been interested in BBC South showing two features on Winchester Diocesan office staff volunteering at Christmas, and worshippers participating in public events at Christmas. Schools of course have and are being celebrated in local press, newsletters and on social media regarding concerts, carol services, nativity plays and Christmas Tree Festivals – and more.

So the debate and interest in Church schools and the CofE continues – both about the statistics, and how this impacts on parishes, but equally, how the nation is interested in what Stormzy has to say. At this time of year, those who take Stormzy’s position, firmly believe that something momentous and incredible occurred in Bethlehem, 2000 years ago.

As you ponder on the stats, the questions they evoke, and await to see whether it’s Cliff or Stormzy at #1 in the album chart on Christmas Day, may I take the opportunity to thank you for all you do in supporting and working in and alongside our diocesan schools.

With best wishes for a peaceful Christmas and a relaxing New Year

**Jeff**

**Job Opportunity : Learning and Schools Officer at Portsmouth Cathedral**

Part-time – 21 hours per week : £16,600-£18,000 (£27,666-£30,000 FTE) Are you interested in working with us to:

* shape a new approach to education and learning at Portsmouth Cathedral?
* engage even more widely across schools and young people of the Diocese?
* help children and young people of all backgrounds to grow in their understanding of the Christian faith.

Our Vision and Strategy sets out ambitious plans to increase our impact as a Christian worshipping community, a place of nurture and discovery, a civic space, artistic venue, and visitor destination – whilst improving our financial sustainability through commercial events and fundraising.  A central part of this vision is our intention to be bold and inclusive in our approach to learning, as we emerge from the pandemic. If this sounds like something you would be interested in please download the **application pack (attached)**.  For an informal conversation please contact Canon Kathryn Percival on Kathryn.percival@portsmouthcathedral.org.uk. **Deadline for application: Sunday, 8th January 2023**

**Angels :** thank you for your observations & celebration that there are more books & decorations this year that are multiculturally representative – good news! You may also have noticed that this year’s Christmas stamps are culturally appropriate:



**CONGRATULATIONS to our schools at Breamore, Oakfield and Hyde** – we continue to lead the country in the *Global Neighbours* national accreditations. Well done to Breamore, the first of our schools to receive the Bronze award three years ago has been re-accredited. Well done to Oakfield, our first IoW school to be Bronze accredited. Well done to Hyde who were notified on their Bronze award this week. Thanks to all schools who are working with us on this really significant and impactful programme. If you are interested and don’t currently engage in the programme, please contact Jane.kelly@portsmouth.anglican.org

***The usual amount of routine links, messages, training and courses will re-appear in our regular Bulletins next year.***

Jeff Williams

Director of Education

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