**Reflection for Racial Justice Sunday by the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell**

When I was Bishop of Chelmsford, serving East London as well as Essex, a large congregation of Bulgarian Pentecostal Christians knocked on the door of a vicarage in Newham asking whether they could hire the church building for their worship on a Sunday afternoon. This was readily agreed. However, to the Vicar’s amazement, a few months later, they knocked again, but this time, reckoning that there was, after all, only one Christian Church, asked whether their congregation could join the Church of England Sunday congregation and form one community. Basically, they wanted to join the Church of England. The church said yes.

And to cut a long story short, on one happy Sunday morning a few months later, I turned up at this church to baptize some, and to confirm around 80 people. And this little inner city, church, found that, overnight, its congregation more than doubled in number, by this huge influx of Bulgarians who’d settled in this country, were working in the East End of London, and were followers of Jesus Christ. Many of them didn't speak English very well. It meant monumental change for this church community. The whole culture of their church was transformed. But they said yes, to becoming a different sort of Church, enriched by the presence of people from a different culture.

The following year, I was again visiting the Church and was chatting with one of the churchwardens, a man, who had come to the UK from Jamaica, in, I think, the 1960s, part of the Windrush generation. I spoke about the warmth and the welcome that his church had given to this Bulgarian community, how they had opened their doors, and how, if I was honest, I was surprised, reckoning that most churches would not have given such a welcome to a group of strangers, a group that outnumbered them, and a group that meant their church would change. He looked me up and down and said, ‘Bishop, We were not going to make the same mistake twice.’ For he remembered coming to this country, coming as a faithful and loyal Anglican, and *not* being made welcome in our churches.

It is a remarkable story. It is a story of a church embracing difference and diversity and being enriched by it. But it is also a story that can help us face up to the difficult history of racism in our church.

In the last year, the report *From Lament to Action*, which I commissioned with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Racial Justice Commission that follows from it, asks us to address our historical failings and build a church that is truly welcoming of everyone and truly reflects the diversity of the communities we are called to serve.

And today is Racial Justice Sunday. I therefore hope we can all be inspired by the example of that little church in East London that welcomed in a whole community.

The biblical vision is, is of a church where every nation, every tribe, every people, and every language, is gathered into God's kingdom, and in this diocese of York we are called, as we *Live Christ’s Story*, to be part of that all-embracing, beautiful, diverse story.

Therefore as part of *From Lament to Action*, we are setting up a racial justice group. It is part of our commitment under *Living Christ’s Story*, to be a church of missionary disciples, which is younger and more diverse.

This group will promote racial justice across the diocese. My hope and prayer is that as they begin to do their work, we will see an increase in vocations, ordained and lay, from people of much greater diversity, that as a diocese we will begin to look more like the communities we serve, identifying the barriers that prevent us from being the diverse church God is calling us to be.

Please, join me in prayer today for racial justice. In our bible reading from St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks powerful and challenging words: blessed be the poor; blessed are the hungry; blessed are those who weep because they will be filled, they will laugh. But he also says woe to those of us who get things wrong, that we will be put in our place. So let us be truly penitent for the failings of our church, to be that church which is the church for everyone. Let us face up to the failings of the past, and let us strive to be that diverse, beautiful church, where everyone is welcome and where everyone is gathered in. Amen