

***Full text of the tribute to
Bishop Graham Leonard given by***

***Lay Canon Emeritus, Jeremy Dowling, at a solemn
requiem held on 22 January 2010.***

“My spirituality will be refreshed by the Celtic Saints”. Thus Graham Leonard, who had been Bishop of Willesden for 10 years, told London friends how much he was looking forward to coming to Cornwall – and remember, those were days before the writers of ‘Yes Minister’ had identified Truro as being the end of the ecclesiastical line, and a place to park Bishops who might be a nuisance to Government.

Bishop Graham was a man of formidable intellect, and it he quickly recognised that his most immediate task was to refresh his clergy, who were amongst the poorest paid in the Church of England. Low stipends meant that Truro was not a place which attracted ambitious clergy, and Bishop Graham lost no time in convincing his Bishop’s Council, and the Diocesan Synod, that good clergy were key to parishes where word and sacrament were properly valued, and where a social gospel was lived out.

The Bishop was determined that the Cornish clergy should be some rungs up the national stipend scale, and not at the bottom of it. Over a three year period, thanks largely to his persuasive oratory, the Common Fund rose, year on year by 21%, 17%, and 19%. And surprisingly, the money came in, with very little grumbling.

Bishop Leonard encouraged lay people to take a more active part in the life of the Church. At that time, the Diocese was almost entirely run by those who could walk home from meetings at Diocesan House in time for sherry before lunch. The Bishop believed in synodical government, and many lay people began their involvement with the Diocese, and church governance, through his encouragement, as did many more, seeking to test their vocations.

A motion from one of the most distant deaneries called for the proper reimbursement of parish expense, at that time hardly met at all, and found such support that it eventually went all the way to General Synod, and became the norm for the Church of England.

In three years, Bishop Graham had won over the clergy of the diocese, who saw their Bishop both as friend and champion of their lot. He made several surprising appointments, and a number of clergy followed him down from London – some of whom, with hindsight, were perhaps taken in more as an act of kindness than as a display of pastoral wisdom.

But the Bishop also quickly realised that the parishes were not used to seeing a Bishop except to confirm – and that quite rarely. So Bishop Graham introduced a system which he had initiated in North London, whereby the Diocesan spent two days a week in pastoral visits. A whole day mid-week, and all of Sunday would be spent in the parishes, taking time with the priest and his family, and gauging the activity there, and meeting people widely. Priscilla, Bishop Graham’s devoted wife, frequently came too, lending a hint of El Greco to the Cornish congregations.

Thus the system of PVs which the diocese has enjoyed since 1973, began. Over time it has, as Bishop Graham envisaged, developed and changed, but at its

instigation, the Bishop saw this as an opportunity to state unambiguously that the Church is at its strongest in community, and that he valued his clergy, their wives and families, and he wanted to ensure that the Church cared for them properly.

A system of Pastoral visits of this kind vastly increased the Bishop's workload, but it made the Bishop more visible, more loved and understood than had been the case for many years. A confirmed workaholic, Bishop Graham realised that he could not continue at the pace which he had set himself unless he had someone with whom to share episcopate, and he successfully revived the Suffragan Bishopric of St Germans, to which he appointed Bishop Richard Rutt, at the time serving in Korea.

The two Bishops shared a love of catholic order and imagination, and Bishop Richard brought a breath of prayerful realism to some of the more extravagant interpretations of quasi Anglican liturgy to be found in the hidden hollows of Bodmin Moor and the more isolated coastal parishes.

With Bishop Richard also living in Truro, and valuing collegiality and a shared prayer life, Bishop Graham was able to give an increasing amount of his time to the considerable demands of the national church, though in fairness, the Diocese came to resent it. He was Chairman of the General Synod's Board of Education, and then of its Board for Social Responsibility in the mid '70s, and also a member of the Commission for Anglican/Orthodox Doctrinal Discussions, a matter which he took very seriously.

He was also the perceived leader of the Anglo-Catholic group on Synod at a time when the Church of England was formulating its Alternative Services Book, and Bishop Graham's knowledge, from his own evangelical upbringing and training, of the sensitivities which language can invoke in a liturgical setting, contributed substantially to the integrity of the eventual texts. Bishop Graham sought always to find a theological basis for language in worship which recognised the importance of the whole church catholic, rather than moving towards any element of protestant isolation.

Bishop Graham actively encouraged relations with the Methodist community in Cornwall, and worked more closely with the Methodist leadership than any bishop before him. This did not alter the fact that the failure of successive Methodist Unity schemes in the early '70s was deeply hurtful to Cornish Methodists. Although the Bishop was closely involved in the ill-fated Covenanting for Unity debates, his enthusiasm for Anglican-Methodist unity was always cautious, with his eyes fixed on what he always regarded as the greater goal of unity with the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches.

Whilst unfailingly courteous and helpful to women wishing to consider the diaconate, he never felt that it could be right for the relatively small Anglican Communion to abandon its own claim to be regarded as a Catholic Church by ignoring the views of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches which opposed the innovation of women priests.

As for most of us, Bishop Graham was always moving on. He was always a very political animal and on the eve of the Government's refusal to acknowledge the so-called African homelands, Bishop Graham announced a formal twinning with St John's in Transkei, the beginning of a relationship which now blossoms in our partnership with Umzimvubu, as the Transkei is now known.

Always politically ambitious, he responded eagerly to those who encouraged him to think that he might succeed Archbishop Donald Coggan. In the event, Robert Runcie went to Lambeth, and Bishop Graham played out the later years of a highly significant ministry as Bishop of London, contributing indelibly to the shape of the Education Act and the future of religious education, and opposing the government strenuously in the Lords on its housing policy and the fate of the Greater London Council.

Thirty years on, what is the lasting influence of Bishop Graham Leonard's ministry?

In this county, he taught people to value their clergy; he revitalised parish life in a remarkable way through the system of Pastoral visits, and in many ways bridged the gap between the administration and the parishes. He encouraged the laity to pray, to learn and to contribute. Church Schools in the Diocese flourished as a result of his knowledge, drive and enthusiasms, and his grasp of what was possible, in partnership with the Local Authority.

The Bishop loved the Cornish Saints, their Feast Days and sometimes doubtful traditions, and he actively encouraged scholarship and a teaching ministry: it was his vision which saw the re-creation of the Prebendal College at St Endellion, which he, a scientist by training, imagined as a place where clergy and laity could go to have their faith broadened by men fired by both the arts and sciences. He was a compassionate pastor of total integrity, consumed by a desire always to give of his best for God and to enable others to do the same.

Cornwall has many reasons to be grateful to Graham Leonard, who never tired in his search for what he felt that God wanted of him. That he eventually found fulfilment in the Roman Catholic Church came as little surprise to those who knew him well; we rejoice that we in Cornwall were part of this good man's constant journeying to God.