

Learning The Dialect

Transcript of Bishop Andrew Rumsey's interview with the Diocesan Director of Communications, the Revd Carole Peters-King

What were the highlights of your first weekend as Bishop?

It was remarkable trio of events and for me, the Cathedral service at Southwark felt like this amazing historical connection to the earliest days of the Christian Church. You know, that moment when all the Bishops put their hands on you, I felt was like a time machine. I was carried back through the centuries to St Peter. That was amazing.

It was a profound and joyful weekend, I loved the serene Evensong at the Cathedral, Prayerbook Evensong is one of my favourites. I think it is my favourite service and then at Ramsbury Holy Cross on Sunday morning, an ordinary Parish church where I feel at home, it was lovely to just be in pastoral contact with people and churches in the way that I shall now be working.

It was remarkable yes, and memorable.

Your first sermon as Bishop led with the idea that people are a priority?

People are a priority for me as Bishop because first and foremost the Church is a community of people, we have huge responsibility for the heritage of the church of England, of course and we have this amazing local geographical responsibility for places, but people make places and people are the body of Christ and my first calling as Bishop is pastoral care of Christ's own flock, this bit of Christ's own flock.

I have been a parish priest for 20 years and pastoral care is in my bones, and it is what I am here to do really.

You have written about the importance of place?

Place is really important to me, because place is about people and they ground real life, they are the context for all that we do. And I think they shape us and we shape them. More than sometimes we realise, places influence the shape of a community, the way the church relates to the rest of society, everything takes places somewhere, everything has a where and a when and therefore the more we understand our context, the better I think we can grow into humanity, we can become more fully ourselves, if we understand where we are so I find it endlessly fascinating.

Therefore Ramsbury area with this large part of Wiltshire and this remarkable poetic, deeply spiritual landscape is fascinating to me, alongside the communities that are constantly changing, overlaid on that and living with it -and yes so I could bore for England about that.

Ramsbury area is a diverse group of communities and, as Bishop, you can only be in one area at a time so you have to be particular to the place you in you have to address yourself and immerse yourself completely in the particular bit you are in, so in Trowbridge, in Devizes, or these wonderful place names like Winterbourne Gunner, wherever you are you have to address and not only address, but you have to take in what it is like here.

So driving through Tidworth on the way here, a garrison town effectively, lots of military presence, you receive that. As a Bishop, there is a lot of travelling around, a lot of visiting, but before I bring my ideas in, I am not bringing the kingdom of God anywhere, the Kingdom of God is already drawing near in that place, so I need to know "What is it like to be in Tidworth?" "How does it feel to be a believer or a non-believer, a member of the military personnel, here?"

So a lot of that is about listening to the people in a place and learning the language, you know at Pentecost the Christian Church received this remarkable ability to discern and speak not only in the broad language but the dialect, the local dialect and I have to learn the local dialect and to do that you don't speak first, you listen to it and you pick it up and you respond.

You were a parish priest for 20 years. How will that shape your new role?

I hope that my experience as a parish priest will help me in this role, I feel sure it will feed into that. It is what I know, it is what I have done.

I feel passionately about clergy wellbeing, we are many of us in this for the long run, we need to find resources and we need to be helped to be sustained over the course of a long career for many people, whatever stage you come into ministry, the demands of the job are such that "you cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength" as the ordination service tells us. And we say that, and we mean it, but we as those who support and serve parish clergy, we have to make and enable that to be real.

So I want parish clergy to have the resources personally and professionally that they need to want to stay, if it right they stay, to be able to stay for the long term, a faithful ministry over years in places, it is worth its weight and people need to be able to enjoy and be renewed by their work, not drained by it, so we need enough wells as well as drains in ministry. I feel really strongly about that. It is what I have needed and I know it is what my colleagues need too.

What is Bishop Andrew's 'well'?

What sustains me? I don't know, it's my fourth day! But I suspect what sustains me will be what sustained me hither too. Time playing in the garden with my children, time listening to music. Songs have always been the things that have nurtured me. I like music and comedy and books, and I love just taking time to enjoy creative life.

We live in a remarkable part of the world, Wiltshire is a beautiful spot so we are going to be exploring as a family some of the amazing places nearby, we have Silbury Hill just up the road, Avebury and all these amazing places sites, so I like to get outside, if I can I like to get up to a high place to pray and I like running and walking, so like many people I feel I can engage with God outside and so in terms of my personal spirituality I love to be outside, I would love to find a local church that does Prayerbook Evensong, that I can maybe under the radar, slightly sneak out and just lead or say Evensong.

I find a great deal of pleasure in home life and I find that a renewing place, as we all do, and so in these ways I am sure there will be lots of sustenance along the way.