

2019 16th February Presidential Address

Introduction

What an interesting reading for a Diocesan Synod when we are starting to focus on the Growth part of Renewing Hope – Pray, Serve, Grow. I am sure it was chosen as a good mission Gospel story – the sending out of the Seventy, but looking around this room, there are over 100 of us here, as a diocese we have the numbers, don't we?

What Jesus said to the 70 is, “the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few”. It is always so in a world with so much possibility. He sent them out like lambs in the midst of wolves. “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals...” God has been abundantly generous, we don't need more stuff.

Go and live the Gospel, see what response you get to telling people, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” Stay where it works and people welcome you, move on where they don't. Don't get stuck.

Be willing to go to new places, beyond where we are comfortable.

We are in for a really good day.

Welcomes

New things, new people. It is great at a Diocesan Synod focused on Growth to have the commissioning of two of our Rural Field Officers who are part of the Diocese's successful Strategic Development Funding for Renewing Rural Hope. We now have rural field officers in each of the four archdeaconries. Thank you to Alice and Claire, Richard and Rhona. Thank you also to Canon Jane Charman for stimulating and developing this work and to Bishop Karen for overseeing it. Rural is one of the things Salisbury is doing well and we are very much making a contribution to the national Church's repurposing mission and ministry.

It is good also to have licensed Carole Peters-King, Director of Communications She is making a great start leading on communications for the Diocese and for me as Bishop.

All new members of the Diocesan Synod are welcome, particularly Bishop Andrew Rumsey as Bishop of Ramsbury, David Pain as Diocesan Secretary and Penny Sayer as Archdeacon of Sherborne. They are going to introduce themselves later, making some personal links into today's agenda.

What a great new staff team we have got. We are really blessed with the people who have come to serve with us, looking forward to your contribution to the Diocese.

I also want to welcome two friends to this diocese from the Episcopal Church in the South Sudan, one old the other new. Bishop Francis, Bishop of Rokon, knows us well. He came to represent his Primate Archbishop Justin and the Province of ECSS at Bishop Andrew's consecration. He has spent a week with me in Salisbury, a week in Milton and Blandford Deanery and a week in Durham. We also welcome Bishop Moses, Bishop of Maridi, Archbishop Justin's former diocese. He has been in Canterbury at the Anglican Communion's conference for new bishops and has stayed on in order to visit Salisbury Diocese. Realised what an asset and a gift you are to the Anglican Communion. We welcome them both very warmly, thank you for being here.

Lambeth Conference

The presence of our South Sudanese brothers in Christ prompts me to say that next year there will be a Lambeth Conference from Thursday 23rd July – Sunday 2nd August 2020. The theme will be *'God's Church for God's World'*. Bible study each day will be from the First letter of Peter. It is personally one of my favourite passages of scripture.

The bishops *'will seek in prayer a common mind on, and a fresh commitment to, the work of evangelism, the role of the church and patterns of life and holiness that proclaim the love and grace of Jesus Christ'*. The design group for Lambeth 2020 is chaired by the Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba. I know the care of the earth, God's creation and the environment, will be an important part of the agenda. It is a top priority across the Communion.

All bishops and their spouses from across the Anglican Communion have been invited to attend by the Archbishop of Canterbury. All Dioceses in the Church of England have been asked to invite our partners for the week before the Conference starts. I will therefore be inviting the bishops of South Sudan and Sudan – though I think it likely the Sudanese will go to Leeds where they are also linked - from Thursday 16th July to Wednesday 22nd July.

That brothers and sisters is a major commitment. It is going to take quite a bit of organising as there could be something like 55 bishops plus their spouses. What a wonderful opportunity for us.

Our Sudan Partnerships Committee is preparing for this. Huge thanks to Canon Ian Woodward for his foresight about this. Bishop Andrew has agreed to chair a group to take on the planning of the pre-Lambeth Conference hospitality programme.

But today I am putting you on notice that we will need to involve people from across the diocese, particularly Deanery links and the Mothers' Union. People still talk

about the last time, so we pray God will use this joyful opportunity for the building up of the Church and Kingdom.

Lent: Praying Together

This will be the third year when we have Prayed Together through Lent as part of Renewing Hope – Pray, Serve, Grow. Bishop Karen and Canon Tom Clammer have gathered contributions from people around the diocese to help us follow daily readings from Luke's Gospel followed by reflections, prayer and actions.

Much gratitude to those who have contributed and to Margaret Higham whose beautiful photo is on the front of the booklet. There is no cost to the common fund. This is a gift from the bishops to the diocese. Now make sure the copies are distributed and well used. Our life in Christ is nourished by prayer. It is the wellspring from which we minister to God's world. It is a great opportunity for us to be praying together.

The State we are in

For one reason or another at the moment it feels as though as a country we've got ourselves in a bit of a mess. After the licensing of a new priest a few weeks ago, one of the Churchwardens cried as she said she had never before felt ashamed to be British but she felt we had made ourselves a laughing stock and that we have lost our sense of values, especially in our failure to be more hospitable to migrants and refugees. What are we doing as a country?

All across the world we are experiencing a rise in nationalism causing tension between the countries of the world. It is good to love one's country. Patriotism matters because we have to love in the particular if we are to love in general. Charity begins at home but does not stop at home. The law as summarised in the teaching of Jesus is 'Love God and love your neighbour as yourself' and neighbour is defined very carefully as everyone, not just our family, tribe or nation, but everyone is our neighbour.

I have never felt more urgent about what the Christian Gospel has to contribute to our common good. There is a real issue of what is being unleashed.

At Parliament, every day there are people outside protesting. Some are pro-Brexit, some want to remain in the EU. In Parliament we have not yet found a way through that will command a majority. We have been round the arguments time and again. I do not want to comment on the politics, which are moving daily, but I do want to say something about our role as Christians and churches.

Pray for our politicians and especially for the government. Brexit is widely thought to be the most difficult task the country has undertaken in peace time. We might not have the best politicians, but they are the best politicians we've got. May God give them good judgement and set them free from self-interest so they act for the good of all.

Pray also for the countries of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, I do think the union is threatened by this, and pray as well as for the EU.

We are in this together. We may be leaving the EU but we will still be European. How are we going to remain an outward looking, global, creative, collaborative and imaginative contributor in this politically and environmentally fragile world?

It feels as though truth has become slippery. There are 'alternative facts. But even if it is difficult to get it right, keep on being about the truth.

That's why it matters we challenge one another, and do so in love. And in such a divided debate, rather than slip into easy caricatures of the people with whom we disagree, take the trouble to represent the views of others at their best rather than worst, as accurately and fairly as we can.

Use the convening power of churches to bring people together to work at whatever can be done locally to debate with and encourage one another. What matters? What sort of society do we want to be? How do we belong together? And demonstrate a love of the stranger. We need to learn from the examples of the good practice we have among us.

And whatever happens on 29th March, we can reasonably expect the sun will rise the day after. Life goes on. Continue to seek to live by the values by which Christians live. Seek peace, truth, justice and above all love. The presence of South Sudanese bishops reminds us of the urgent need for us to be outward facing and alert to the needs of one another not just of self. For God so loves the world.

Safeguarding – Past Cases Review

There are always a few notices that need to be given at Synod. So now I turn to the Past Cases Review which I will be writing to all incumbents next Wednesday, 20 February. In the spirit of the Gospel, we all want to protect and care for our children and all adults at risk of harm. We wish to ensure that our churches and church related activities are as safe as possible for everybody and to have the best possible safeguarding policies and practices. But in order to be certain that we are fulfilling our duty of care, it is important to establish that all known past cases of concern have been considered and dealt with appropriately. We are, therefore, embarking on a comprehensive and historical safeguarding review.

This review will require us all to look back into our records – in the parish, at Church House and at The South Canonry. I am, therefore, asking incumbents (or church wardens where there is a vacancy), to make sure that any instances of concern that relate to the behaviour of clergy and/or church officers towards children, and/or adults who may be at risk within their parish(es) have been reported to the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, Heather Bland.

They will need to check parish files and other sources, including the collective memory of the community by talking to one another in PCCs or elsewhere in the community. The Parish Safeguarding Officers will be an important part of this process and Heather is writing to them to let them know that my letter is going out. Any concerns found not to have been reported, should, please, be immediately brought to Heather's attention.

My letter will contain a full explanation of the review required and includes detailed definitions of those covered by it. Further support on how to conduct the review will be provided through a dedicated PCR Helpdesk and via the Safeguarding page of the Diocesan website. Incumbents (or church wardens) will need to make a response on behalf of **each** parish for which they are responsible. Given the work required, I have set a deadline for receipt of responses of 31 May 2019.

I do need to stress that this is an absolute deadline and we do need a 100% response.

I do appreciate that this will require considerable effort at parish level, but all of us understand that this represents our contribution to the Church of England's commitment to becoming a safer Church for everyone.

Unless we attend to the housekeeping, and see it as part of the substantial agenda rather than as an unhelpful burden, we will not make progress in commending the gospel of Jesus Christ to a society in which our past and present failings prevents people from hearing the Kingdom of God is very near.