

2019 19 June Diocesan Synod Presidential Address

In this gathering of our Diocesan Synod there is a duty to reflect both on our Church life and the context in which we meet. Thanks to the Archdeacon of Dorset for leading the worship and for his thoughtful reflection on events following the English Reformation.

Last Sunday's Observer had an article by Deborah Mattinson from the research and strategy consultancy Britain Thinks. A survey they had commissioned described the dynamics of Britain as a deeply divided nation.

Nearly three-quarters of us expect this to get worse in the year ahead. Forty-eight per cent self-identify as a "have-not" while 52% see themselves as a "have". We're torn apart by social class, by geography, and by how we vote – especially on Brexit.

The starkest divide, though, is age: 52% of over-65s feel optimistic about the future of the UK, contrasting with just 23% of under-34s.

Is that the benefit of the wisdom of older age – well represented in our churches? When I was growing up most young people were optimistic and hopeful about the future of post-War Europe. We live in very different times.

A lot has been made about 31st October, 3rd Brexit day, being Halloween but Brexit or not, life will probably continue on 1st November. It's worth remembering that Halloween is the day when evil is recognised and put in its place. It gives way to All Hallows/All Saints Day and All Souls Day. Our lives are held in God's and we live in response to that love whatever the circumstances of our lives.

As we are in the process of reviewing 'Renewing Hope – Pray, Serve, Grow' what can we say to the wider society about finding and living with hope? A Church cannot just be about our own internal organisational issues.

A healthy Church has balance and a varied ecology in which we all can thrive. To measure ourselves we have been using not a single issue but a 'balanced scorecard'. Our God-given diversity means we are a mixture of theological traditions, different social groups, of varied abilities. It is a strength that gives balance and helps us find that unity which is in Christ.

There is a lot to give thanks for across the Diocese as a whole and in our 452 parishes, 148 new worshipping communities and 196 Church schools and academies.

Renewing Hope has been running for 4 years. We said at the outset that this is the stage we would review it. Bishop John Gladwin's review is part of that process. It was really helpful to have experienced external eyes to help us gather and think through the evidence of what is happening and how we might respond. Some principles are emerging. Of course we need to match resources and reality against our hopes and ambitions. I like the focus on 'going local' but how does that work out in practice?

Lots is going well. We really do have a presence in every community and often it is a thriving presence. We need to keep alert to the number of new houses being built, often creating substantial new communities among us. How do we minister to people who are moving in and how do we engage them as partners and fellow members in the body of Christ?

Fair share numbers are dropping in the diocese as a whole but this is not true in every parish. Are we measuring what really matters and how do we match finance with people and task?

We set ourselves the task of increasing the number of vocations to ministry, both lay and ordained. There has been considerable success in developing lay leadership and an astonishing number of people are committed to serving Christ in this way. nevertheless, we still find it difficult to find office holders in parishes – churchwardens, treasurers, PCC secretaries – as well as people to fulfil essential roles for example as Foundation Governors in our church schools.

The numbers of those offering for ordination are increasing. In 2020 we expect to hit the target that we set ourselves of an almost 50% increase with 15 people to be ordained deacon, 11 stipendiary and 4 Associate.

Working with our Chair of Finance, Nigel Salisbury, David Pain, our Diocesan Secretary, has developed a really helpful longer view, “lengthening our stride” so that we have a 3 year financial plan and a 10 year vision. This feels more manageable and is better stewardship. We can make adjustments whilst holding to direction.

There are an enormous number of initiatives coming at us from the national Church. They are always interesting, exciting, have lots to commend them. We can’t do everything but much of it we are already doing in a variety of ways so we can sometimes use the national agenda to serve the local church.

Growing Faith

On the other hand, the Growing Faith initiative is one that really has caught our imagination and we think will be helpful.

Growing Faith is the vision set by the House of Bishops to ensure a national commitment to achieve a significant culture change within the Church so that every aspect of mission and ministry is seen through the lens of what it means for ministry with children, young people and households. It will flow into the type of relationships encouraged between schools and churches, and how these are developed to resource and support households to grow in faith together.

Growing Faith envisions children, young people and households coming to faith, growing in discipleship and contributing confidently to the Kingdom of God through the community of

faith. It is about how, as members of the whole people of God, children and young people are encouraged and how the whole Church is equipped to think inter-generationally.

It brings together work in Education, Evangelism and Discipleship, Ministry, Renewal and Reform and Setting God's People Free (SGPF), seeking to enable the people of God of all ages to live out their faith confidently in homes and schools. In doing so, *Growing Faith* seeks to maximise effectiveness and enable dioceses and parishes to have ready access to resources for growing faith in churches, schools and households.

Joy Tubbs as our Director of Education has agreed to be our champion for this.

Safeguarding

At Synod in February, I spoke about the Past Cases Review and followed up with a letter to all parishes setting out what would be needed to help us complete it.

We have received responses from almost all 452 parishes so thank you for the hard work over the past four months. I know it has not been easy. But...if you come from one of the handful of parishes yet to respond, I need to urge you to reply as soon as possible. This isn't optional. We must have a 100% response rate or we will not have completed a full past cases review.

As well as your replies, we are gathering records from Lambeth and other places. So this is going to take time and we do not expect there to be any conclusions before the end of the year.

It is very important that we are able to continue to complete this complex review without media interference. So, if you receive any interest from the media in the meantime in all cases please refer them to our Director of Communications, Carole Peters-King because it is Diocesan-wide review. If you have any individual concerns or questions please do speak to her. I know she will be happy to help you."

Renewing Hope

Bishop John Gladwin's Review says we're not in crisis but there are some difficult issues to that need to be dealt with.

One of the things we were reminded of in some work done with Veronica Hope-Hailey, Dean of the Management School in Bath, and an incredibly helpful adviser in the early stages of our 'Renewing Hope – Pray, Serve, Grow' was the importance of trustworthy leadership. Her research shows that you can deal with difficult issues best when leadership demonstrates Ability, Benevolence, Integrity and Predictability. That will be useful to the Church in what I continue to think of as God's small miracle of the Diocese of Salisbury but it might be useful to the nation in which we live and serve.