

Diocesan Synod – Thursday 10th September

Presidential Address

Jonathan Triffitt's appointment after a 6 month secondment from the parish of Blandford Forum and Langton Long was part of phase 1 of a reorganisation at Church House to establish new ways of working. There is a lot of good in this and David Pain, our Diocesan Secretary, has worked hard to build a Senior Leadership Team and greater collaboration across the various departments at Church House.

Phase 2 of this change is out for consultation at the moment. The aim, of course, is not just new ways of working but better ways of working. We would have been doing this anyway, and the process was delayed by Covid-19. The aim to save 10% of staff salaries fits well in the present time. Most of those involved can see the need and some of the benefits but if implemented this would lead to redundancies and that will be painful particularly for the people directly affected.

Tonight's meeting is the AGM of the Diocesan Board of Finance. Thank you to Nigel Salisbury for all he does as Chair of the Board. He carries very significant responsibilities on our behalf and I am grateful to him and his colleagues for all they do.

In addition this evening we are looking forward in extraordinary circumstances towards the diocesan budget for 2021. The paper that has been circulated is both a tour de force and a work in progress. Synod is asked to endorse the 7 principles at the start of the paper, though in reality we recognise that they are not all principles and 3 of them are simply statements of fact. We can improve the drafting at the next stage but tonight we need to endorse that these are the keys for our approaching an uncertain future with confidence.

The principles are developments of previous work. For example, "We remain committed to Christian ministry in every parish in the diocese" is a slight variation on our previously held commitment to a flourishing Christian presence in every parish. Don't get too hung up on the change of words. If there is Christian presence, there will be Christian ministry. Looking towards setting a budget, it is Synod's task to endorse a way in which we can continue do this so to support mission and ministry throughout the diocese.

We are not being asked to choose between Plan A and Plan B in the paper Towards the Diocesan Budget 2021. The two Plans indicate the sides of the spectrum we expect to be within. I am hopeful that a Diocesan Stewardship Renewal at an appropriate time next year will produce a significant response from those who are able to give more. We know it's a difficult time but Jesus said something like, "If you don't ask, you won't get". If enough people believe in it and are able to give even more generously, next year that will put us at the Plan B end. I am hopeful, but if I am wrong we will need to develop Plan A. And of course, there are all the possibilities between the two.

Tonight presents itself as a financial meeting but in reality this evening is about mission and ministry. It is about what we believe and what we do in response to those beliefs. It was good to start with worship and the licensing of the new Director of Mission and Ministry and Deputy Diocesan Secretary.

This year in response to Coronavirus churches across the diocese and around the world have been marvellously adaptive. Prayer at home, worship online and the service of our communities and those in greatest need have been a deeply impressive witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a practical generosity which has got on doing things as best we can in constrained circumstances.

It's a rather obvious thing for a bishop to say but I believe in the Church and in present circumstances that has never mattered more. Lockdown showed us why church matters, that church is both people and buildings (that is hardly a new thought). It also taught many of us why church buildings matter.

In the mid to late Autumn the bishops will be holding a series of meetings online across the diocese listening to what has been going on, recognising all we have been doing and giving thanks to God for it so we can get beyond the present and confidently face the future.

Emergency appeal for the Sudan and South Sudan in relation to Covid-19

Thanks be to God for the generosity of all who gave to the emergency appeal in July for the Sudan and South Sudan in relation to Covid-19. The aim was £50,000 and we raised £78,600. There have also been some additional local collections for parish and deanery partners. You are amazing!

Tonight I am pleased to announce that members of the family of friends of my parents have made a generous gift of £50,000 in honour of our parents,

Dermot and Margaret McCracken and Sydney and Kathleen Holtam. The gift was made on 1st August, Lammas Day, Loaf Mass Day which celebrated the first fruits of the harvest for Communion. In this case it is the sharing of bread with those in need. The purpose of the gift was to ensure that our diocesan appeal reached its target of £50,000 (for which it is not needed). Then it is to establish a Bishop Holtam Fund to continue, in an area of need which cries out for relief, work the value of which a previous generation witnessed in their lives and professional commitments to healthcare and education. The McCrackens were both doctors, my father was a teacher and my mother a nurse.

This fund for work in Sudan and South Sudan is for any one or combination of the following purposes: (i) the provision of education (ii) the improvement of physical and/or mental health especially (a) training in hygiene and/ or (b) design and construction of toilets (with doors which do not require hand touching for opening after the use of any associated hand washing or other sanitising facilities) and (iii) provision of photovoltaic electricity.

I have also heard to today of a bequest from the late Jane Pelly, one of Bishop Wordsworth's grandchildren, which the Diocese has been asked to administer: £100,000 for the Bishop Alison Theological College currently in Arua in Northern Uganda which we hope will one day return to Western Equatoria in South Sudan.

The Sudans appeal and these additional gifts strike me as particularly helpful tonight, as examples of generosity in response to the providential generosity of God and of our being outward looking, serving others and not just looking after our own needs. This is very much the personality and character of the diocese of Salisbury and the spirit in which we can face challenging circumstances with confidence.

Now let's do it. Thanks be to God.