

2021 22 June Diocesan Synod: Presidential Address

Thank you to Debbie Mclsaac for leading our worship.

Here we are for the last time of asking. My last Diocesan Synod and the last for some of you, too, if you are not standing to serve again for another term. Thank you to all of you for what you contribute in various ways to the life of the Church and tonight thank you especially for your contributions to the Diocesan Synod. Thank you to Lydia Cook, who is chairing this evening's meeting and who will be moving to Exeter Diocese. I can't really say how much I will miss her because I will miss you all but thank you, Lydia from the Diocese of Salisbury and when the time comes in October, go well and God bless.

I had hoped that by the time of my leaving at the end of next week we would have been free of restrictions because of COVID-19 and able to meet in person. I also hoped we would be at a sensible staging post in response to the impact of the pandemic so that the way ahead would be clearer, but it is not.

As the Chairman of the Diocesan Board of Finance, Nigel Salisbury, says in his covering letter to the Annual Report and Accounts, this has been an extraordinarily difficult year. None of us know when or how we will come out of this pandemic. Nationally the Church Commissioners have provided so far £35 million sustainability funding which is part of £300 million made available by them over three years to the Archbishops' Council for the national Church. The cathedral has been helped but as a diocese, we are not in the greatest need and are only now engaging with the Commissioners asking for support. We have put in place a financial framework with which to work to a balanced budget in four years. We have a Mission and Pastoral Plan to help us re-imagine mission and ministry and set strategic aims. Precisely what these will be depends a great deal on the response to the Generous Giving campaign in September.

We know that the financial impact of COVID has been uneven. Some people and some parishes have been hit very hard. Individually and as households, those of us on fixed incomes are better off because we have not had the same spending opportunities. Of course, overall, finance is a big challenge but it helps to break it down into small portions. The Archdeacon of Dorset, who has been leading on the giving campaign, pointed out that if on average the increase in giving each week is £2 per person, the price of a cup of coffee, we would raise sufficient for ministry costs and parishes would also have generated significant additional income for local purposes.

Finance is a matter of faith. We give because we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ matters as proclaimed in the mission and ministry of the Church. We have seen locally how churches have adapted and served in their communities. From my perspective it has been very impressive and very important.

I was very struck that Pope Francis said we will get through the pandemic by caring for one another – love your neighbour. He went on to say we will address the issues of climate change through contemplation. By really noticing the gift and beauty of creation we cannot go on abusing and consuming it as if it was just for me. Prayer and contemplation are what will change our relationship with God, one another and all creation. Beliefs and values really matter. We need to invest in them in the life of the Church and those of us who can will need to increase our giving generously.

If the Giving Campaign is successful you will have the potential for a creative re-imagining of ministry rooted in the parishes, chaplaincies, projects and schools of the diocese. If it is less successful, God will still be God and you will still have the potential for a creative re-imagining of ministry. The Church will adapt to survive but there will be a difficult and painful reorganisation with cuts that will make it harder to retain our commitment to a Christian presence in every community. The impact will be uneven and the danger is that the poorest will be hit hardest. Through our common fund and fairer share we can do better than that. I am sorry not to see you through this but I am confident in God and confident in you and I pray all will go well with you. Financial Framework, Mission and Pastoral Plan, Generous Giving campaign; Love, prayer and contemplation: let's do it and ask God to bless us on the way.

There is a lot for me to give thanks for tonight. When we introduced Renewing Hope: Pray, Serve, Grow we did a lot of work on the meaning of hope which is not the same as optimism. For Christians hope is not about whether things go well or not. Our hope is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It is on the cross that we see our hope most clearly in the God who loves us, made us, sustains us.

On Tuesdays last week I spent most of the day in Dorset. I visited St Edward's School in Poole, the only joint RC/C of E school in the diocese. Students told me it had been a difficult year for them, too, and they told me how well the school had had done in supporting them and their online learning. I blessed a peace garden and planted a Tranquillity Rose. The site manager told me to be careful of the thorns. Hope is about how we handle the thorns and face the difficulties. In my meetings with those to be ordained next weekend a common theme was that they have learned most when facing the challenges and difficulties of ministry and life.

My day in Dorset continued at the Pilsdon Community and Hilfield Friary. These are beautiful but not smooth places. Talking outside with the core community at Pilsdon our conversation was interrupted by people who wanted to tell their stories, people with difficult lives who were being given the space and support for a big reality check so as to face the difficulties they have encountered.

Hilfield has changed so much since first I encountered it 45 years ago. It is a broader, more varied community of Friars, families, students and still a few who are there because they needed a bit of looking after and stayed, making their own contribution. Hilfield has reorganised around the care of God's creation and through it the Society of St Francis is being renewed. The values of the community have not changed in their Christian living in the spirit of St Francis.

On the way home we stopped in Sherborne to visit Margaret Morrissey. The stroke on Ascension Day was a huge blow for her and for Patrick. She is determined and is making progress slowly. It's tough but she was full of hope.

Pilsdon, Hilfield, Margaret... human, fallible and hopeful, as was St Edward's School where people knew about renewing hope even when there are thorns.

This diocese has wonderful partnerships with Latvia, Evreux and an embryonic rural Church link with the Danish Diocese of Haderslev. The link with the Sudans is one of the standouts of the Diocese of Salisbury. It has been a huge blessing, and it has been exceptionally difficult. They are countries in which people do not live at peace with one another. Church is one of the very few signs of hope. The relationship carries some of the strains of the worldwide Church and Anglican

Communion. As a diocese we have worked hard to keep faith and honour God in sustaining our partnership. So it was a joy for me to receive warm greetings in advance of my retirement from both Primates, Archbishops Ezekiel Kondo and Justin Badi, assuring me that the partnership continues in good health, strong faith and renewed hope.

It's been wonderful on recent Sundays to be physically back in church. I cannot visit everyone so I have been going to representative places to say goodbye and God bless - a hospital, prison, school, several parish churches for good ordinary, confirmations and the blessing of the beautiful renewal of St Thomas Salisbury, and the ordinations in the cathedral next weekend. Congratulations to the cathedral for their Gold Eco Cathedral award, the first cathedral in the country to do so and the third gold award in the diocese after Hilfield and Beaminster.

Thank you to the diocese for your support and encouragement of me as the lead bishop on the environment and for engagement with the 5th mark of mission. We have 126 churches registered with Eco Church, the highest number of any diocese. You've done well and we're all going to have to do a lot more to sustain the environment and limit climate change in God's wonderful creation. We should be doing it for itself alone but it is also an evangelical imperative.

Young people generally think the Church has got it wrong about matters of gender and sexuality. That's one reason why serious and careful engagement with the Living in Love and Faith project matters beyond itself. Young people know the danger of environmental and climate breakdown and they see faith as a resource to tackle it. The Young Christians Climate Network relay from the G7 in Cornwall to COP26 in Glasgow will be coming through the diocese 19th-22nd July - stopping in Trowbridge on 19th, West Lavington on 20th, Shrewton on 21st and Salisbury on 22nd July. We hope there will be opportunities for engagement.

We won't be able to gather in the cathedral for a big farewell as my final service on 3rd July when I will hand over the care and oversight of the diocese to Bishop Karen but as it is going to be online so I can say to everyone that you will be very welcome and you won't even have to travel to be there. Helen and I have received hundreds of letters and cards wishing us well. We have appreciated them very much and I am sorry that we have not answered them all. Thank you.

We are going to be at South Canonry through into August as we clear up and get ready to move to Brighton where two of our children and their families live. The other two are in South London so we hope our new home will be good for all our family. Salisbury is a great diocese and the 78th bishop has found it a joy to be here. Thank you for this shared life and work in Christ. Our hope has been renewed, nearly every day. Every blessing on all that lies ahead. Now we had better get down to the business of the evening.