

Presidential Address at Diocesan Conference 26th September 2020

Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, I am delighted to be speaking to you this morning after we have just shared together our experiences of the last six months. As we recalled on Thursday evening, this time last year we declared 2020 to be our 'Year of Pilgrimage' and hoped it would be extra special. Well, it's certainly proving to be a year like no other, an unexpected pilgrimage, and in so many ways - as we've just shared - we're still proclaiming that faith matters, as we look out for each other.

It's right we begin with prayer and thanksgiving, telling the joyful story of the Diocese of Llandaff in Covid days. And I want to say thank you to you all:

- Thank you for taking Church out of our buildings when they had to close; for all the activity on-line, for maintaining our worship and pastoral life, and for returning prayer to our churches when we could do so.
- Thank you for being such an important part of the kindness, care and solidarity which is needed in local communities. This year both the Cathedral and Ewenny Priory are celebrating 900 years of their foundations. They have seen many threats and crises over those 9 centuries – as we know our Cathedral was nearly destroyed during World War Two – but we continue in faith and compassion as our neighbours face once again a very unwelcome environment.
- Thank you too, to the Representative Body of the Church in Wales and our own Board of Finance – to Mike Lawley, James Laing, Jan Boyce, Mark Brampton and all who have worked so hard to keep our financial ship steady as we also heard on Thursday. I know all too well what challenges and hardships our parishes are facing but I hope you feel our determination to support you.
- And thank you for what comes next. We meet today as we face more measures to protect our communities; with more than half the diocese already in some form of local lockdown and all of us apprehensive, knowing we have to adapt.

Adapt to how public health will still dominate. We can't simply sit out this crisis: we have to respond as we sustain the worship of the church and its pastoral ministry. People need to know the love of Christ for them and to be met in their needs, as life is *now* not as we would wish it to be. We also must adapt to the challenges in our sources of income

and how to ensure parish life continues to flourish. And that's what most of my address to you today is about.

We continue joyfully in our pilgrimage, knowing God is good, he listens to our prayers, we listen to his purposes for us, and we travel together as a community of faith.

As we think about what it means, to continue in our pilgrimage, let me remind you that the whole Province of the Church in Wales began a different kind of pilgrim journey in 2012.

It was called the 'Transformation Agenda', all six dioceses signed up for it, the Governing Body agreed it: you may even have voted for it when this Diocesan Conference discussed it more than five years ago.

The whole purpose which lies behind this initiative of our church is to allow us to sustain parish ministry. As we watch Chapels close and Non-conformist ministers become few on the ground, we cannot afford to watch parish life also disappear.

I passionately believe in parish ministry and suspect you do too. It is many of the things which we associate with parish life which will carry our local communities through this time of Covid trial, and which we want to hand on to our grandchildren's generation:

- The maintenance of our parish churches;
- The offering of life events in a sacred setting – baptisms, weddings and funerals;
- Having parish-based clergy to whom a congregation can relate;
- Attracting lay officers who are well-resourced and well supported by the diocese;
- And connections made - by Foodbanks, dementia care projects, charity shops, job cafes, debt clinics – places our communities need help and where they can find hope.

If that 'parish life' is important to us (and I think it is) we have to move forward because we can't sustain it unless we do adapt. This isn't about whether *your* parish can survive but whether the whole church can operate within parish life.

We are putting before you today a new plan for parish life in Llandaff. Some of you are pretty much there, you heard the 'Transformation' challenge and got on with it. We have 11 Rectorial Benefices (effectively single parishes) which,

in different ways – and they all have a very different feel to them - model how we want to operate. 75% of our clergy already work in some form of collaboration. What we are proposing is an accelerated and well supported implementation of what we've begun and which, as we'll hear later at least three other dioceses have completed.

Before I tell you why we're doing this and what undergirds our thinking, let me tell you what it's not:

1. This is not a bureaucratic restructuring in order to make the life of the diocesan office or its staff easier. It's true that you will hear us say that having 105 separate units which will soon all have the burden of individually registering with the Charity Commission is inefficient and surely a waste of our resources which ought to be focused on serving people rather than what it takes to produce over a hundred sets of accounts. But this is not about diocesan convenience. It's about the effectiveness and sustainability of the local church.
2. And nor is it a scheme to cut clergy numbers. On the contrary, this is the first time to my knowledge that we're being entirely transparent about the deployment of clergy. We have a finite number of clergy posts, based on what we know we can currently afford. We could have more if we grew our stewardship. But for now we're publishing what posts go in which Ministry Area and encouraging you to think about what else you need in terms of children and young people workers, outreach workers or mission enablers: they are part of our funded vision.

It's not a restructuring for restructuring sake.

It's not a hidden agenda for cutting clergy posts.

There are 2 strong principles on which I hope we will build our future and I put them before you today.

Firstly, the structures of our life have to be built on what we believe about Christian ministry, our theological understanding of how we shape our life.

If I hear any criticism of the Church in Wales' 'Transformation Agenda' it's usually that there wasn't sufficient theological reflection which went into it. Which is partly why I set up a piece of work across the whole diocese three years ago to consider what we believe about ministry. It was led by the Rector

of Cowbridge, Stephen Adams and 130 people, clergy, Readers, laity participated. It's a very good piece of work and it will now keep us clear about who we are as we face a rethinking of what ministry looks like.

Let me give you just a taste of what will inform our decisions:

- There's the importance of relationships: the church flows out of God who is Trinity, God who embodies inter-relationship. So the quality of our relationships really matters.
- From that relational character we look to the worth, equality and dignity of the whole church: the work of the church is the work of the whole people of God, which is why our Vision takes really seriously lay discipleship and lay ministry. Our Vocations work seeks out clergy of the future, but ministry belongs to whole people of God. It's also why we value ministry in the Valleys as much as in the Vale or in Cardiff.
- Because we believe in the transforming power of God, the Holy Spirit, at work in what we do, we are interested in how we live and what we are becoming: into what do we grow? So, things which seem so important to a secular world – order, reward and remuneration, hierarchy and power are all only valid if they serve our pursuit of being mature disciples of Christ, 'growing into the full stature of Christ' as St. Paul puts it.
- Being Christ-like in our service is our goal. So, we have to be collaborative, not just because we get better decisions that way and protect our well-being but because it's the model set by our teacher and Lord. "I do not call you servants... but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father... I chose you and I appointed you to go and bear fruit"
- And those collaborative relationships seeking to exhibit the grace of God, are expressed and practiced in the liturgy of the Church, most notably the Eucharist. We are pilgrim people; we are resurrection people, whose song is Alleluia and whose name is love.

Which leads me to the second principle on which we build our life of ministry and mission.

In all of this we are a community of faith not solitary Christians.

This year we are watching before our eyes the enormous costs of social isolation and what happens when communities can't meet, or sing together, or grieve together, or hug one another.

At a diocesan level I really want us to feel connected to our big Anglican story. We're a worldwide church with a history and tradition which ought to make us confident and proud. What is being proposed – collaborative working – begins with us feeling part of the whole. What are we 'becoming'? Not a narrower and narrower interest group but a diocesan community of faith of Anglican believers with a broad outlook. Rejoicing that we eat together at a broad table (that's when we're allowed to!). Most of us experience that community of faith week by week at the parish level. Some of our congregations are very small but that's okay (a small congregation is not a failed large congregation), provided we stay connected with one another.

As I said in the handbook for today all challenging work or complex issues need us to work together. When life was simpler we might have prospered on our own, but life now demands a diversity of outlook and a networked approach.

So, my friends what is being proposed is a diocesan wide project to help us achieve our goals on our pilgrim journey. We know what the shape is we wish to create: 29 Ministry Areas up and running by 1st January 2022, with established leadership and operating as a single legal entity. Every congregation will relate pastorally to a Vicar but there will also be new resources to help implement our Vision of confident Christians and a habit of outreach.

That is the given but on Thursday some of you rightly raised how we involve the insights and energies of the parishes in achieving this. Very few parishes haven't made some progress already in this direction so it won't be wholly new terrain but there are some key decisions which remain ahead; what is your Ministry Area to be called being just one of them; what are your outreach priorities being another.

Now for the rest of this morning we'll be introduced to how other dioceses have done the same and we'll begin to ask the questions of where we go from here. Because it's you who have the answers to what Ministry Areas will look like, and it's you who have the relationships which matter.

The most important thing is that we go forth, into this winter and all that the next year holds, with a sense of direction and energy, and holding on to God's purposes for us, proclaiming that faith matters. It really matters in a Covid world.

We are going to live this coming year in a Covid world. We are going to commemorate All Souls offering liturgies of bereavement and loss for people who have not been able to grieve properly. We are going to celebrate Advent and Christmas abnormally but will still be telling people that God is with them.

And, as we reach another Lent, Holy Week and Easter we are going to remind ourselves that we are Easter people, who face all our trials and tribulations with Alleluia on our lips and generous self-sacrificing love as our enduring ambition. That means we will look out for our neighbours.

May God indeed bless us as we go forward together proclaiming the love of Christ.

May we seek the welfare of our communities for in their peace and healing will we find our blessing.

+June Osborne

Bishop of Llandaff

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