



Esgobaeth Llandaf Diocese of Llandaff

Mae Ffydd Yn Cyfrif | Faith Matters



Bishop of Llandaff's Presidential Address to Diocesan Conference 2023

The Rt Rev'd Mary Stallard





Rwyf mor ddiolchgar am y croeso a gefais gennych yn yr esgobaeth. The bike that you presented to me has enabled me to get around Cardiff, it's helping me to stay healthy and to be a little bit more environmentally responsible. I am trying to get around the diocese (by other means) and to discover more and learn more about the whole diocese. I'm encountering the joyful story of faith in this diocese and seeing the opportunities and challenges that our varied communities live with.

With your help, we've raised over £1000 for Christian Aid - an amazing organisation doing great work in partnership with others to show our commitment to our sisters and brothers across the world, particularly those who live in places where the full impact of climate change, war, disaster and injustice is felt so keenly. Mae'n wych bod esgobaeth Llandaf wedi ymrwymo i wneud gwahaniaeth i eraill. I know that several other clergy and lay people are also running tomorrow, raising money for other great courses. Thank you for all you are doing to support such work.

I am keenly aware that Llandaff Diocese has been through great changes in recent times as I travel around the diocese and begin to get to know people, it is evident that there is a strong desire for greater listening. It is obvious that our Ministry Areas are operating with different levels of strength and success. There may be some places where we need to adjust groupings and listen more carefully. I can see that many clergy are tired and there are lay people who feel burdened by the roles they are carrying. I've also encountered clergy and lay people who are working in energising and life-giving ways. I feel encouraged and heartened by the resourcefulness, the commitment and the desire to serve God and neighbour faithfully here.

I think what we need now after much change is a season of gentle growth, evolution not revolution. Becoming who we are called to be.

The one change I want to make to our strap line is in a spirit of working with the rest of the dioceses in Wales to make it Esgobaeth Llandaff : Mae Ffydd yn Cyfrif; Llandaff Diocese: Faith Matters – I am sure we never intended to say that faith only matters here.

At the heart of faith of course is our vocation - our calling. Hence our title today. This was described so well by Richard our Dean at a Bishop's Council meeting when he spoke about recalling the love that first inspired our commitment to God.

There are three key things that I would like to say to the diocese at this time. Tri pheth sy'n allweddol i ni wrth symud ymlaen.

My first priority for us is about Prayer: Edith Stein, is credited with the famous words, *"The first hour of your morning belongs to God. Tackle the day's work that God charges you with, and God will give you the power to accomplish it"*.



But how can we find and nurture prayerfulness like this, ourselves and in those we serve?

Learning to be faithful in prayer can be a life's work. We may talk about prayer and encourage people to pray but how well do we support people, and help them to have lives underpinned by Prayer?

On holiday in Greece this year, Andrew and I tried to take a tiny environmental action by walking, rather than hiring a car. There are wonderful tracks through the forests, marked by small blue, and white parallel lines, in the colour of the Greek flag, these clever little way markers are like an "equals" sign where the path is straight, and the curve to the left or right to show where to change direction. We have followed these paths over several years. This year we discovered many of the waymarks had not been repainted. Lots were faded or missing. Many of the parts were overgrown and wild. It was hard to find a way and we often got scratched legs trying to find the path, we discovered some new signs that were very different on laminated bits of cardboard, but these were often very flimsy and did not seem to stand the test of time like the old painted signs.

The way-marks in all the different states made me think about how we teach people to find their way through life supported in prayer. With the decline of traditional worship in many places, it can feel as though the way-marks are faded and it is hard for people to find direction. It is also hard for us ourselves to feel confident, supported and upheld.

I am so glad, and grateful that we already have, prayer and spirituality as a focus in the diocese. The festival of prayer shared with Monmouth Diocese and the initiatives in many of our churches to encourage and help people to learn about prayer and to be resourced to pray are so important.

Our Cathedral, with its excellent music, and with a strong daily pattern of prayer and doors that are flung open in welcome is a great example of what it looks like to model a life where prayer is natural, beautiful and valued. I want to work with you to grow our confidence as prayerful people and I am keen to discover with you, more of what that may look like across the range and breadth of Llandaff Diocese.

Mae'r ail o fy mlaenoriaethau yn ymwneud â'n galwedigaeth

/ my next point is about our calling - our Christian character.

The three pictures on our screen are three images of love. There's a painting of Jesus that speaks to me of the Jesus who sees me with gentleness and patience. Who sees all my faults and troubles, all my mistakes and stumbling, and who recognises me as a beloved child of God. Just imagine being looked at and loved, unconditionally.....



It feels so freeing, so full of grace and hope.

That's how God loves each of us.

That's how God calls us to love one another

That's how God calls us to love the world.

We need to receive that love ourselves. If we know God's love, then we need to show love to one another. To look at each other through the same lens of gentle, accepting love. Llandaff diocese is blessed with a spectrum of church tradition and ways of worshipping. Our calling is to live our faith and to practice this Christ-like way of being. It needs to be present in the way we think, speak and treat one another. We need to stop regarding one another with eyes that are hostile and negative, and to get better at treating one another with the gentleness with which Christ treats us.

The second picture on the screen illustrates the cost of this. It is one of the most moving communion sets I have ever seen. It is from a church in Cornwall, where a chalice and patten made of crystal were given in memory of those who died in the Penlee lifeboat tragedy. The transparent vessels speak to me of lives poured out for others. That's what Jesus shows us and that's our calling.

In case we feel it is impossible, too hard for us, the third picture is a prayer offering of a child. A young girl from a church school. Aged just 11, Amy lost her mother completely unexpectedly, days after giving birth to her little sister. Amy had lots of questions about this, and yet one lunch-time she came and placed a prayer on the heart of Christ on the cross in the school chapel which read, "Dear God, please keep my Mum ok in heaven safe and healthy, Amy". What trust and faith – The prophet Isaiah spoke of the leadership of children. The extraordinary faith of some of our young people, only underlines the importance of our work in schools, youth-clubs, Sunday schools and toddler groups. And the gift of this work is often that when we think we need to teach and educate our children – we can discover that they have much to show us too.

I have seen tremendous signs of hope and resurrection already in the diocese. If you have not yet visited Ty Santes Fair in Skewen – go and see it. A church that has found resurrection – a former Victorian church that has been rebuilt as a place of community and welcome with a clearly visible Christ-shaped heart in the care and prayer that it offers local people.

At St Fagan's, Aberdare last Sunday we had a confirmation of 64 including adults and children. Amongst the confirmees was a senior teacher from the school – confirmed among side his pupils, parents were confirmed with their children, and members of the MA churches had come together to prepare those being confirmed, supported by some of our growth enablers. There's splendid work being done at the Pen Rhondda Dementia Support Group at St Matthew's Church Hall, Treorchy. Our Mother's Union across the diocese are leading important work on facing up to and tackling Domestic Violence with their splendid "Behind closed doors" campaign amongst other projects. Our schools are doing some amazing work - you have witnessed today some of the



wonderful Flourish work led by the Young Faith Matters Team. I could go on and mention much more and I know there is a huge amount I have yet to discover.

I am very aware that amongst all the great work there are also come considerable challenges. We probably all recognise that we have more church buildings than we can sensibly and responsibly use and repair. This is becoming increasingly apparent as cost-of-living pressures and our environmental understanding leads us to question how we use our buildings. We know that we need more, and younger vocations if we are to sustain a ministry that can realistically serve and grow the church. We also have a way to go to become a more financially viable diocese for present and future generations of disciples.

The only way I believe that we can face these challenges in a spirit of hope is together: together with one another and together with God.

The word “confidence” comes from the Latin *con fides* “with” “faith”. And it is with and through discovering our faith that we will find our way. **And here is my third and final point** which is about re-discovering and affirming our Welsh Anglican Identity.

Mae Duw wedi rhoi rhoddion unigryw i ni yma yng Nghymru a chyda threftadaeth ffydd gyfoethog. We have been given so many gifts in our Church in Wales: We have a deep connection to community, to place, to language, stories of hope from the past, and songs and even a landscape that speaks of the mystery and ways of God – of the valleys and the mountains of our faith journey.

Our diversity in tradition and language offers us a way to speak to the diversity of Wales today. We have the Eisteddfod coming to Pontypridd next summer. Wouldn't it be great for us to be at the forefront of those who welcome visitors to the Eisteddfod? How amazing if we could have entrants from the diocese for Welsh learner of the year, and if our churches across the diocese all considered carefully our use of language and the genuine warmth of our welcome.

When we look at how God has always been present to humanity we might see a reflection of our own times.

The ancient Hebrew people, journeying from slavery to freedom found that God was present in a pillar of cloud and in flames of fire.

We have choices about how we face our call and how it speaks to us in times of challenge. We can be despairing or we can be hopeful: A cloud can offer the threat of rain. Or it can offer the hope of water to bring growth.



Fire can burn and destroy, or it can purify, giving warmth and light.

And the cross is our most precious sign of God's presence. The cross is a sign of our human sin and the temptation to get rid of God, or it is the means of grace and the greatest witness to God's never-failing love.

I'm really proud and happy to feel called to work with you and amongst you here in this diocese. I believe we are in a season of growth, a time where we transition from a season of much change, to evolution and gentle growth. A time to focus upon our Christian character. We have much still to learn. I hope you will continue to journey with me in discovering more of God's call to us here:

Gweddiwn/ let us pray. Dduw sy'n ein galw, helpa ni i wrando ar dy lais gyda chalonnau a meddyliau agored. Boed inni fod yn barod bob amser i dderbyn dy gariad a'th faddeuant gyda gostyngeiddrwydd a gobaith. Cynorthwya ni i adnabod dy bresenoldeb yn ein gilydd, fel y gallwn gydweithio i adrodd dy stori lawen, adeiladu dy Deyrnas a helpu eraill i adnabod dy ddaioni a'th ras. **Gofynnwn hyn yn enw Iesu ein heddwch. Amen**

God who calls, help us to listen to your voice with open hearts and minds. **May we always be ready to receive your love and forgiveness with humility and hope. Help us to recognise your presence in one another, so that together we may play our part in telling your joyful story, building your Kingdom and helping others to know your goodness and grace.** We ask this in the name of Jesus our peace. Amen.