

CLERGY STUDY DAY – OPENING TALK

INTRODUCTION

I want to begin today with a very big 'Thank You' to you all. Thank you for the warmth of your welcome to me, and indeed to Rosemary and the family, over this past year. I am enormously grateful for the way in which you have welcomed me into the diocese, your parishes, deaneries, hospitals, prisons, schools and local communities. I am also extremely grateful to everyone for the time you have given me meeting 1 to 1 in your homes; the meals I have been given and the hospitality from churches and deaneries. It has been an enormous privilege, and I am delighted to be serving as your bishop. You are a great bunch with whom to serve! So thank you.

Then I want to explain the pattern of the day. In this first session I want simply to share the story of the past year with you. I have been encouraged strongly to do this to hopefully help everyone see that what I share with you later has arisen from what I have seen, observed and heard you, your parishes and sectors are already doing in serving God's mission. In other words what I later share is from the grassroots and has been shaped and re-shaped by you already (even if unconsciously some of the time). I believe it is God's vision for us as a church serving in the county and city. So this first session is taking you on the journey I have travelled this past year.

We will then spend time together looking at the Scriptures in Isaiah 56-66. These chapters arose early in my conversations through talking about Raymond Fung's 'Isaiah Vision'. They have become particularly important in my study and reflection of Scripture in relation to what you are all already engaged in doing.

After coffee we will think together about the Mission of God. Again very early on in my conversations the question of how the mission statement, 'Joining together in the mission of God' had rather been lost behind the 4 values, 'Discerning God, Valuing People, Serving community & Enabling change'. This led me to test this thought out and I found it repeated regularly. Thus began the journey to what I will outline later as putting this, though adapted as 'Joining together in the transforming mission of God', back at the top of our agenda. Then after lunch we will explore more specifically how this will be shaped by us as a diocese in the coming years. What I believe I am sharing is something organic in which everyone of us, and all our parishes and sectors can share and adapt locally. There is no programme here just vision and strategic direction.

So to the story.

INSTALLATION

It was always my hope that in a variety of ways my Installation service would not only be an act of worship and welcome but that it would also convey some important messages. I am immensely grateful to all those involved in putting it together, but in particular to the Dean, John, & the Precentor, Jacqui. I think we did manage to convey a commitment to the involvement of children and young people; to the valuing of a wide variety of worship styles and traditions; to engagement with the world church and to the priority of mission.

In my sermon I highlighted the importance for my own ministry of being out and about in villages, towns and city and the priority of teaching, proclaiming and healing – all flowing from God the Father's amazing love for us in Christ and empowered by the Spirit.

I was deeply conscious of responding to God's call as laid out in the Vacancy in See document which was largely summarised in the Archbishop of York's charge to me which was included in the order of service.

I committed myself then to spending the first 8 months meeting people, listening, observing, visiting etc. before taking time out in November to pray and reflect on it all.

FIRST 8 MONTHS

The first 8 months were extremely full. I am so glad though that I managed to meet with just about everyone of incumbent status face to face in your homes. I also managed to talk 1 to 1 with many of the curates, some SSMs, some retired priests and many though not all in sector ministry. I found the Deanery evening events extremely valuable, and I know from the responses and comments I have received these were warmly welcomed by Readers, retired clergy and particularly churchwardens. I managed to visit quite a large number of parishes, a variety of schools, businesses, hospitals, organisations, institutions and the like. I also began to build relationships with civic leaders. During this whole process I was enormously grateful for the openness and clarity with which so many of you spoke with me – about your own ministry, your settings and also about the wider needs and direction of the diocese. When I went away in November I had a complete digest of all the notes I had made from our conversations, particularly my final question to you all, 'What do you look for from me as your new Diocesan bishop?' I have sought to listen carefully to all of this.

Within these 8 months I want to assure you that I took my days off, time with the family, holidays and a regular monthly quiet day. I'm sure I didn't get it right all the time but I tried to live a balanced life.

Inevitably some things stand out in the memory – so just for the record here are a few, though some come later than the first 8 months:-

The tram journey through Nottingham, and in particular the amazingly positive reception at both New Art Exchange & Nottingham Contemporary; returning to my old university and seeing how much had changed (and bits that hadn't); the later visit to Trent University; standing on top of a huge agricultural machine at John Deere, Langar; the Youth Confirmation in the Minster; the Mum and daughter confirmed together at Kirkby; the new school of Samworth Academy; the contrast of the need for one at Magnus – yet the commitment of staff and pupils at both; the Sunday spent in the East Trent group – 8 services and driven around in an open top 1930s Bentley; the rain at Newark Show; the walk through Sherwood Forest with Edwinstowe school children; Christmas dinner, and service, in Sutton-cum-Lound school; the launch of St James Porchester's 75th anniversary with an amazing array of local community representatives; the blessing of the wonderfully re-furbished St Lawrence, Gotham; the Fair-trade event at St John's Worksop; the visit to Mansfield & Ashfield Hospitals, long arranged, just as announcements of cutting chaplaincy provision were made; the day in Nottingham Prison and the power of the Advent Carol service in the Minster.

I have previously noted to Diocesan Synod the significant point of preaching on Isaiah 60 at St Luke's Gamston. This was at the outset of September when some threads were beginning to emerge in my thinking. Part of this significance was the focussing in on Isaiah's later chapters. In my first few days whilst meeting everyone in Dunham House a conversation with David McCoulough about the Isaiah Vision had led me to pulling Ray Fung's little book off the shelf and re-reading it. Further conversations with David, Nigel Rooms, Karen Rooms and others led to sensing that reflecting around these themes was going to be important. The Isaiah 60 sermon was just the point where I knew that I had to pursue this further in listening to where the Lord might be leading us together. So through the autumn I spent time reading and re-reading Isaiah, especially 56-66, and exploring the commentaries.

In sharing initial thoughts with Bishop's Council in September and receiving a very positive response from them the threads began to emerge. The further sharing of this at Diocesan Synod, and the feedback from people like Jerry Lepine, Mark Tanner, Pam Bishop and several others helped affirm me that this was the right direction, but also helped shape the thinking further. So by the time I reached St Katherine's Royal Foundation in November there was a shape appearing. So I re-read, prayed, reflected, walked, thought and wrote. By the time I returned home I had written the outline

of a vision for the Diocese to share with the Bishop's Staff team when we went away in early December.

THE REFINING PROCESS

a) Bishop's Staff Residential

I quite deliberately did nothing to this paper before sharing it with the staff team so that they could react to it 'raw'. Together for 48 hours we explored Isaiah 56-66 together and worked through the ideas. By the end together we had done a great deal of re-shaping. It was much better for all of this. It meant then some significant re-writing ahead of Bishop's Council. This was done and agreed at the start of January. It was also decided that the main way of presenting to Bishop's Council would not be by lots of paperwork ahead of time but by presentation and working it through piece by piece.

b) Natal

You are all well aware of my passion for the world church; indeed I believe it was one of the factors that led to the invitation to me to become bishop here. The brief for the new bishop was clear about developing the Natal link and exploring making further links. So I was determined to visit Natal within my first year. You will be aware that I went, along with Rosemary, with 8 others – Barbara Holbrook, Kon Apokis, Maureen Rodgers (MU, Arnold), Chris & Heather Rattenberry (Ravenshead & Lowdham School), Dan Bebbington (Christian Police & St Andrew', Nottingham), Denise Dodd & Jane Henson (St James', Porchester). At the same time Claire Goode and 3 others made a small story link visit from Gotham to Richmond. It was a very worthwhile visit for many reasons. But specifically in relation to our vision it offered an opportunity for me to share some of the thinking drawn from Isaiah in a different context; it also gave an opportunity to ask Chris Rattenberry to engage with some of it himself, and finally to allow those who travelled with me to respond and talk with me about different aspects of it. I am deeply grateful to all of them for their comments, observations, and the conversations. Certainly what you will be hearing today has been partly shaped by these.

It was also significant for me that whilst on this trip I had e-mail conversations about a visit later this year from Canon Sam Hasom and others from Israel / Palestine and that whilst in Rwanda for the installation of Archbishop Rwaje I had time to talk with the Archbishop of Burundi and 3 of his fellow bishops. The significance will become clearer later on today. Sometimes the timing of events is significant in determining just what God is saying to us.

c) **Bishop's Council**

It was straight into Bishop's Council from my return from Natal. Again we spent time together looking at Isaiah and then exploring the mission statement, strategic directions, core values and how they might work out in practice. There were clear agreements and endorsements, changes suggested, thoughts shared – and ideas about today proposed, including something of the shape of this talk. Everything was helping further sharpen up our direction. We agreed the change to the mission statement, endorsed the 3 strategic directions but left open for further reflection the final detail on some other matters. This will come at Bishop's Council in a couple of weeks time; today contributes in that process.

d) **Bishop's Staff & Directors**

Just a few days after Bishop's Council Bishop's Staff & Directors met together to reflect on the impact of the developing Vision on the role and work of Diocesan staff. It was one of those occasions which was incredibly creative. Something came together off the back of the Council's questions and comments. It led to further clarifying matters, and simplifying presentation.

Before I came to serve alongside you I was well aware that I was inheriting a really good Bishop's staff team. I want to pay public tribute to them here for the way they have welcomed me, adjusted to working with a new bishop, and kept working incredibly hard. We have in +Tony a highly gifted evangelist and networker; in Nigel P & Peter, the 2 best Archdeacons in the Church of England; in Nigel S the most strategic Chief Exec; in John a very fine Dean; in Michael & Chris an outstanding Chair of Finance and Registrar; in Sarah someone who will be excellent as Dean of Women's ministry and finally in Tony E the most prayerful, thoughtful and supportive chaplain I could have asked to inherit.

Alongside this team I have discovered just how strong our Diocesan staff team is. The Directors, Carole, Rachel, David Meredith, David Mc, Nigel & Claire have been encouraging, thoughtful, challenging and incisive in all my dealings with them whether that be as individuals or together as a team. In turn their teams are filled with gifted people. We are blessed. It may be that for those of you who have not been in other Dioceses are unaware just how good the team is here. Serving you in the parishes and sectors this team should help us all move forward under God.

That couple of hours together was energising, exhilarating and clarifying. It absolutely heightened my sense that we are heading in the right direction, and that the Lord has given us the right people to make things happen.

e) **Today**

This phrase brings me to today, and to you all.

The Weddings Project events received high praise from those of you who attended it. You know that one of the findings of the thorough research behind the Project is the importance of 'the Vicar' in the whole process. This is testimony to the continuing importance of the ordained minister in mission and pastoral care. It reminds us that clergy need to be out engaging with people in the world; leading the way in representing Christ, teaching the faith and ensuring good pastoral care. Your calling and role are vital in fulfilling the mission of God in this Diocese. This is not to deny the ministry of all it is simply to highlight the continuing importance of your role. It is therefore also very important that we keep looking at ways of supporting and enabling other ministries of the laity so that those who are ordained can focus even more on their core calling and ministry.

Over this first year I have seen lots of good, and very good, things happening across the Diocese. Good examples of developing the use of buildings for more flexible worship, and use by the community – at Sutton on Trent, Aslockton, , Gamston and Gotham for example – with future exciting plans at St Nic's, Nottingham and possibly in Clifton. Exciting examples of engaging with the community in all the work Karen Rooms and others have been doing around the possible development of Nottingham Citizens, the ongoing community engagement in Huthwaite, Kinoulton's Post Office, Eakring's regular community events and St John's Mansfield's response to the needs of the homeless before Christmas. The launch of a new Mothers' Union at St Thomas', Kirkby, the responses in Radcliffe to +Tony's Seed Scattering weekend are greatly encouraging. So too are the ecumenical developments in the Levertons. We have outstanding work being done in our 2 universities, and across all the hospitals and prisons. I have been enormously impressed by work in our church schools, and the celebration services taking place throughout this bi-centenary year of Church schools have got off to a flying start.

I have been really impressed by those whom it was my privilege to ordain as priests and deacons last summer, and the quality of people in training and coming forward for ordination training is excellent.

We have a great bunch of Area Deans and Lay Chairs, working increasingly well together, and developing further the renewed Deanery structure.

The challenge for us all I believe is to see where and how we can develop from good to very good; from very good to excellent. In my time as Chair of CMS we spent quite a bit of time reflecting on the principles of Jim Collins, 'Good to Great'. I'm not suggesting we do the same in terms of materials but I think we do want to reflect on the same journey for ourselves. How under God might what we do move from good to great?

CONCLUSION

This is a personal challenge too. I am very conscious that I will not have got everything right during the year. I will have needlessly upset some of you I'm sure. I will have failed to offer encouragement or support on occasions when I should have done so. There will be things I have done that I believe to be right but with which you may disagree or not understand. I am a sinner saved by grace just the same as you. Forgive me where I have not been all I should have been. Help me grow further and be a better follower of Jesus Christ with you, and a better bishop for you. That said I have loved this first year.

I hope that sharing the story of this year with you, in this way, has helped you get a feel for how what you are doing in your sectors and parishes has contributed heavily to reaching this point. I have been seeking to discern what God is already doing amongst us, recognising it, and encouraging us all to join in. I trust it makes clear that what I will share later has been drawn from the grassroots not simply dreamed up in my mind. What I want to share around 'Joining together in the transforming mission of God' is I believe our vision from God together; our God given strategy. It grows too from engaging with Scripture, particularly the passages from Isaiah that we are going to study in groups in the next few minutes. For we must always be rooted in the Scriptures; they shape us and direct us. We engage with them in our context to discern how God is working out his transforming mission amongst us now – and how he calls us to join together with him in it.