

## Presidential Address Diocesan Synod: St Peter's Battersea 17<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Members of Synod, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I express my thanks and appreciation at this last meeting of the triennium for the contribution you have each made, and I am glad there is a reception at the end to mark this conclusion.

During these last few weeks we have journeyed through Petertide, one of the Church's seasons of ordinations. We have made seventeen deacons, ordained nineteen priests, received the orders of another, and consecrated one Bishop. Bishop Alastair, we welcome you this evening. At Michaelmas, God willing, Anna Drew, our Director of Communications, will be ordained priest in Rochester Cathedral.

It has been a full and joyful season. The gift of Holy Orders reminds us that the Church is a community in which we are open to the calling of Christ and we live this calling out relationally - we are both vocational and relational.

One of the tasks in the new Bishop of Woolwich's role description is to lead a programme of initiatives grouped around the theme 'Valuing our Parishes' With Bishop Alastair on the episcopal team, we have a new Bishop who begins with a considerable head start because he already knows so many of our parishes, and knows them well. So, with the help of a team, we are taking forward this programme of 'Valuing our Parishes' by opening what we have called 'Parish Conversations'. In these conversations your bishops, along with the Archdeacons and other members of the senior team, will visit every parish of the Diocese over the next two years. This is not another visitation piled on top of everything else our parish clergy must do. They are not inspections! We want to hear and learn of your hopes and dreams in our parishes - conversations intended to deepen our mutuality and build

on the bonds of affection that already exist, to focus together on the challenges and opportunities each context presents, to share good practice, and to encourage one another with thankfulness.

This is the context in which our application to the National Church for funding from the Diocesan Investment Programme was made, and has been granted in full. I was very clear with the team as we put this application together that, were we to be successful, I did not want to see two tiers of parishes emerging in the Diocese - those that received DIP funding becoming an elite stream, and everyone else following behind as 'almost rans'. That would make a travesty of our common life and I was - indeed I am - clear that this must not happen. We shall receive the £29m over the next nine years - £21.63m in the first phase of the grant, to be awarded immediately, with an additional £7.44m to fund our hub and resourcing churches in due course. This substantial financial award will help us in our endeavours, with a funding cycle of 9 years a vast improvement on 3 to 5 year cycles. It will allow us to be creative and imaginative as we take forward mission and ministry to meet the challenges of our time - and none of it will be at the expense of core funding for our parishes. For this and our life together in this Diocese, let us bless the Lord.

I shall be very interested to see what develops from the Parish Conversations because they are genuinely open encounters, and put into action our Diocesan vision to be Christ centred and outward focused in all we do. We shall in this Synod approve the 2023 Annual Report, and I express my thanks to Nicola Thomas our Diocesan Secretary and her team at Trinity House for preparing it. The Report restates the basis of our common vision which is, and I quote, 'founded on mutual commitment from all who make up the Diocesan family to walk together in the pilgrimage of faith, supporting, encouraging and resourcing each other in our common task'.

With this in view, and as we enter this next stage of our common life - walking together on our pilgrimage, supporting, encouraging and resourcing one another in our common task - I want also to ask one further thing of you, something both vocational and relational.

I have repeatedly said that I expect all those who hold my licence in this Diocese to speak well of one another across difference, and I have said that this commitment is not about avoiding difficult issues or managing complexity but rather about honouring Christ in one another - for all those who have been baptised have received the Holy Spirit and have an honoured place in the body of Christ.

I want now to articulate this with greater clarity asking that we continue to speak well of each other, of course, but I also want us consciously to honour one another. 'You are the body of Christ and individually members of it,' as St Paul says (1 Corinthians 12.27), also acknowledging the whole variety of gifts and services. We cannot do without one another, because we are saved together or we are not saved at all. Christ our Lord brings home not just the ear, or the leg, or the tail of the lost sheep - he brings the sheep home entire.

I charge our Deanery Chapters and Deanery Synods to continue to pray together. To make a virtue of praying only with those we think are like us is one of the most curious decisions a Christian can make. It is a long way from Bartimaeus's prayer, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' (Luke 18. 38) and seriously inhibits the possibility of encounter with God. The consequences are not limited to our spiritual or interior lives, however. If we pray only with those who share our convictions, we render pastoral ministry virtually impossible. What is the logical extension of this choice? That we only bury the dead who agree with us? That we comfort only those

who take our view? God forbid! We are the body of Christ and are each members of it in virtue of our baptism. We can show that we honour one another by praying together - it is enough simply to do this, because everything else will flow from it.

So, my beloved sisters and brothers, we are entering an exciting time in the life of this Diocese and our life together will open in new and exciting ways. We wait expectantly to see what the Lord will do, and we seek God's guidance and God's blessing on all that we in our turn wish to do in response to his love in Christ - all for God's glory and the advancement of his Kingdom. Walking and praying together on our pilgrimage, honouring each other, supporting, encouraging and resourcing one another in our common task of proclaiming the Gospel and working for the Kingdom in faith and hope and love.