

Presidential Address, Chelmsford Diocesan Synod, 17 November 2018

Luke's editorial introduction to the puzzling story of the widow who just won't leave the unjust judge alone is that it illustrates the need to pray always and to not lose heart (Luke 18. 1). So here is the perseverance challenge for me, the place where I hope not to nag the diocese, but where I must pray and not lose heart: how to say the same thing again and be clear it is the same thing, but say it with freshness and verve? (Though isn't this the challenge the church faces in every age? And the preacher every Sunday?)

So here goes –

If the Church – and by Church I mean the baptised, saved people of God nourished by word and sacrament and kindled by the Spirit – is to be the sign, foretaste and herald of the kingdom, and if the arena where we must live out this vocation is the world - and for us that bit of the world called East London and Essex - then we must be transformed. Our priorities, our energies, our finances, our governance, even the things we pray for, must be realigned and reignited so that the Church can be God's **Transforming Presence** in and for the world. And to achieve this big vision we have tightened the focus of our energies on for priorities –

1. To inhabit the world distinctively –

means that **we are all disciples of Jesus Christ** with a responsibility to live a distinctive life: a life of prayer and worship; a life shaped and challenged by scripture; a life nourished by sacrament; a life which speaks to the world of

another world and another life and another way - the world, the life, the way of Christ. This is why we keep coming back to basic things that need to be embedded in the Christian life: a non-anxious reliance on God; a sense of proportion, knowing that it is God's Church and God's mission and God's world, not ours; the life of prayer; the gifts of the spirit. All of this is emphasised in our ambition for every church and every worshipping community to be a school for disciples. It is also mirrored in the latest initiatives coming from the Anglican Communion that we should live what is being referred to as a *Jesus Shaped Life*, a life shaped by Christ and overflowing in those qualities of life that Jesus speaks about in the beatitudes: hungering and thirsting for what is right; working for peace and justice; marked by poverty of spirit

2. To re-imagine ministry –

means that **we all have a share in God's ministry**; that ministry belongs to everyone: it is not something that certain people with certain gift of responsibilities do on our behalf. This, of course, requires oversight and must be continuous with what has gone before, for we are the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of God. Therefore, we rejoice in the huge increase in vocations to ordained ministry and the huge flourishing of licensed and authorised lay ministry that we have experienced. This is both a sign of God's blessing and, I believe, a sign that in the diocese of Chelmsford we are doing something right! All this must continue. But we still have some way to go in helping every Christian recognise their calling to discipleship, and in establishing our Mission and Ministry Units as partnerships that will enable

sustainable ministry to be maintained in every parish; that no priest to ever work alone ever again – and this more than anything else will be key to clergy well-being – and that churches working together will allow specialisms to flourish and a pooling of resources for all kinds of mission and ministry projects, not least our vision to plant new churches. Great progress has been made. For large parts of the diocese MMUs are now business as usual and have been for at least a couple of years. They have reached their target figure for clergy numbers and are now at that blessed place I dreamed of where there is no longer any immediate need to have any discussion about clergy numbers. But in some parts of the diocese there is still work to do and it must be a priority over the next year to finish this work we have started so that we can all enjoy the benefits of working together, pooling resources and focusing energies on our mission not our organisation. However, I do not underestimate that this will be costly, and I thank you for your perseverance and your efforts, especially those of you who serve as Area Deans, Lay Chairs, Deanery Treasurers, churchwardens and PCC members

3. To serve with accountability

simply means **we are all accountable to God and to each other** and we must make this more evident in all we say and do. So, for instance, churches should be accountable for their ministry and should expect to be held accountable. PCCs should be accountable for raising and paying the parish share which pays for the ministry they receive and supports a fair sharing of ministry costs across a diverse and often needy diocese. The principle upon which we work is mutuality. This means those who have the least resource being supported by those how have more. It also means giving into the mutual support fund not

just working out how we can receive from it. And if a parish doesn't pay its allocated share it should expect questions to be asked and of course – there is no avoiding this in the long run – repercussions to follow. At the moment we tend to sell a house each year to balance the books. This can't go on. The diocesan central services should be accountable for the stewardship of the resources they are given and the priorities they make to support the parishes. And so on. So here let me record my thanks and welcome to Synod Joel Gowen who started as Diocesan Secretary and Chief Executive last month. His first task has been to review how our resources in the Diocesan Offices are aligned to our priorities; that is the priorities we have set as the Synod of this diocese. He is to be applauded.

This priority is, of course, also about service; the humble offering of ourselves in service of the Church and of the common good.

4. To evangelise effectively...

well, maybe this priority needs evangelising itself. Yes, it is still about how we share, explain and commend the Christian faith. But our vision is expanding and we now want to say it is how **we share the faith, grow the church and serve the world**. In other words we recognise we need to work harder to demonstrate that evangelism cannot be cut off from service or social action, nor only seen as sharing faith with individuals when growing new Christian communities – church planting – may be the best way of inviting people to the Christian faith and where we in this diocese face the very particular challenge of many vast new housing estates. And this is as much an issue for Colchester and Chelmsford as it is East London. It is undoubtedly the case that where the

ministry of evangelism and service go hand in hand in churches working together to offer a variety of opportunities for worshipping and gathering together that we see the church grow.

Therefore I also applaud those parishes still putting on mission weekends, running Alpha and Pilgrim courses, opening pop-up shops, running food banks and homeless shelters, our growing work with Citizens UK and the astonishing difference we are making through our work with refugees where what we are doing in this diocese is leading the way for the whole Church of England. This also demonstrates that our four priorities are not four sealed compartments. Those things which show how we inhabit the world distinctively – our prayer, our social action, our love of neighbour, our readiness to speak up for justice - are also the things that will best demonstrate the full salvific power of the gospel to change and transform.

At the same time we must rise to the latest challenge which is to establish 101 new worshipping communities by 2028.

This sounds an impossible target, but it breaks down to every deanery planting one new Christian community every 2 1/2 years. Still an ambitious target, but one I believe we can reach. Neither is it a target imposed from elsewhere, but our own aspiration to be the church for every person in this diocese and in every network and neighbourhood. In other words it is the latest expression of the Church of England's historic vocation to be the Church for everyone. And a Christian community could be a church plant meeting in a school or a community centre on a new housing estate, or a mid-week Eucharist in a sheltered housing unit, or a re-vivified congregation, supported and revitalised

by help form neighbouring churches in a deanery or MMU. One size definitely won't fit all. Neither can one tradition. We need the full 3D technicolour gospel of the Church Catholic to woo and win this nation.

Finally, we recognise the need to put a particular emphasis on the work we do with children young people, schools and families. A group is forming to take this forward and to identify new initiatives we may need to take.

And all this work – overseeing it; developing policies to support it; holding each other accountable for progress; scrutinising developments; testing new ideas; setting the budget; and praying for the transforming power of God's Holy Spirit to anoint it - is the work of Diocesan Synod. It is the work you have signed up for. It is a work we joyfully do together for the building of God's kingdom here. Therefore we begin this new Synod at the place where the things of the earth are transformed into the currency of heaven: a holy table where what Jesus did for us is remembered and made present and with angels and archangels we make our offering or praise. Or as Paul put it to Timothy in our first reading: "Take hold of the eternal life for which you were called." (1 Timothy 6.12).

As this new Synod begins we commit ourselves to two paradoxical truths – sticking at what we have already begun; asking God's spirit to make it in new! This work will require perseverance and imagination. May the Spirit bless us with both.