

St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocesan Synod 12 November 2016

Presidential Address

The day after Armistice Day and before Remembrance Sunday, we are mindful of not only the terrible cost of the two World Wars but also of conflicts since, including the appalling events reported from Aleppo and Mosul. I have asked that each Friday at noon we all pray for the people of Syria and Iraq, and ask this Synod to pray now with me, as I use the words of the prayer composed for us by Bishop Mike:

Lord we pray for the people of Syria and Iraq;
For an end to killing and terror,
for an end to hostilities, for a lasting peace.
For courage for those delivering humanitarian aid;
for all those seeking to bind up wounds and alleviate suffering.
For those made homeless by the conflict,
for those fleeing as refugees,
and for those providing welcome and hospitality.
We pray for your church in Syria,
and for faith in the midst of tragedy and suffering.
We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen

As you will have gathered, this has been a time of change in the Diocesan Office. I am immensely grateful to our Interim Diocesan Secretary, Charles Darley, for the skill and determination with which he has undertaken the challenges of his role, and for the considerable and necessary changes that he has been undertaking.

I am also extremely grateful to the Diocesan staff who have been bearing significant organisational and personal upheaval. The process of bringing the organisation into line with our Vision and Strategy, and working towards financial sustainability for the Diocese is on-going, but a huge amount has been achieved since Charles arrived just over five months ago.

Change is always challenging, and there is always the lure of how things used to be, the appeal of the cucumber fields of Egypt. But if I can mix my biblical metaphors, our hand is now firmly on the plough and we are definitely looking forward, and are not turning back.

So I am thrilled that we have appointed Anna Hughes to continue this movement as our new Diocesan Secretary. Anna is currently Chief Executive Officer of Suffolk Mind, the mental health charity, having previously been their Finance Director, and earlier was Finance Director of Ipswich Town Football Club. She is qualified as a chartered accountant and read Geography at Durham.

She impressed the panel with her positive and open attitude, and her evident experience in leading organisational change and development constructively and inclusively, while facing considerable resource constraints. Of course, she is no stranger to the challenges of church buildings, having just led the successful rejuvenation of St Mary's at the Quay as the new Suffolk Mind well-being centre, just down the road from here, known now as Quay Place.

Anna is a life long Anglican, and brings an understanding of the challenges and opportunities for rural as well as urban churches.

She will begin with us on January 30th.

I am delighted to welcome Anna here this morning, and ask her to say just a few words to us.

[Anna speaks to the Synod]

Thank you, Anna.

I would ask at this point that Synod keep Nicholas Edgell, our previous Diocesan Secretary, in your prayers. His kidney transplant operation is scheduled for November 29th. Please pray for him, Nicola and all his family.

In a few minutes time we will be looking at our priorities from our Strategic Plan and their implementation. We have made huge progress, and are getting down to concrete actions. So I want to take a few minutes now reflecting on the context in which this activity is placed.

The context is God's call on us, and God's activity among us. When we started the vision and strategy process the foundational statements made by all those involved in the consultation process were about God's presence and activity in our communities and people's lives, into which God is calling us to participate.

God's action comes first. That's why the phrase, "God is with us" begins our vision statement. All that we are and all that we do is in response to God's presence and call among us, the presence and call incarnated for us in the person, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our first response to God's presence among us, and the goodness God pours upon us, is gratitude. Gratefulness is the heart of prayer and the continuing response of faith. God is giving us all we need to follow God's call. Gratitude is our response. When our disposition is gratitude, then we are open to God's call, God's activity among us, open to possibility, open to what is new and life-giving.

We are living in profoundly uncertain times, on a global scale that has an impact on all our lives. The events of recent months and days in Europe, the Middle East and the United States are raising extraordinary challenges about human worth and dignity, and of what it takes to make human community. As Christians we are called to respond again out of gratitude – gratitude to the God who made us all, and calls us all into communities where difference is gift not threat, where the other, whoever we and they are, is a child of God. For of such is the Kingdom of God.

So our response to God's call is always action; generous, grateful, faithful action, not for our own sake, but for the sake of those we are called to serve, caring and valuing all as God does. And we give of ourselves in generosity and love when we are grateful for what we have received ourselves, knowing ourselves loved and cherished.

I see it in established congregations enlivened and deepened, where worship, fellowship and service are wonderfully intertwined. I see it in ventures where people are taking risks, engaging with different folk they have not engaged with before, having conversations about faith, not afraid of not having the answers, building new communities of friendship and faith. I see it in community projects small and large caring for people in a range of needs, making a difference in different people's lives, and seeking neither recognition nor reward.

These aren't good news stories. They are great news stories, for us all to rejoice in, and be grateful for. They include stories of failure as well as success, stories of having a go, and not working, and stories of having a go, and being totally surprised. Stories of people hearing God's call, and stepping into the unknown. We will hear of two later this morning. I would just hold up another example, that I witnessed a couple of Mondays ago, and that is the remarkable Causeway community at All Saints Sudbury. This is a community of people with learning disabilities who gather monthly for an evening of worship and fellowship with the wonderful leadership of Lynne Fish and her colleagues. There are numerous examples across the diocese, often involving quite small steps but which are making a real difference.

The next meeting of this Synod will be in the Cathedral, on March 11th. On Ash Wednesday, March 1st, Bishop Mike and I will impose ashes and celebrate the eucharist on - or near if the weather is too bad – Dunwich Beach at the start of our pilgrimage from Dunwich to Bury.

We will spend ten days walking, visiting villages, schools, community programmes, congregations, farms and businesses, to celebrate how the people of this diocese are responding to God's presence and call among us.

We invite whoever wishes to and is able to join us along sections of our journey. We will be inviting people to pray with us as we go, giving thanks for all God is doing in our lives, and the lives of our communities.

And on Saturday March 11th at 9 o'clock I will burst through the west door of our cathedral, with Bishop Mike catching up not far behind, and we will share with you what we have seen, the great news stories of growth, of sacrifice, of love, of service, of celebration, of struggle, of faithfulness, of compassion, of witness, of justice, of rejoicing. With gratefulness we will share the stories of what people, grateful people, are doing in response to God's presence and call among us. And +Mike and I cannot wait to do that!

Thank you.

Bishop Martin 12 November 2016