



Diocesan Synod 4 November 2017

Presidential Address script by +Martin

May I welcome Phil Baillie, our relatively new Diocesan Youth Worker – who has already shown what a difference he can make by increasing the attendance at Gather, the youth event at the Cathedral, from 118 last year to 220 this year. Welcome, Phil.

May I also welcome Sally Gaze, our brand new Dean of Rural Mission Consultancy who brings national and well as Norfolk experience in rural ministry to help us in our renewal of our rural churches. Welcome, Sally.

You will know that we said farewell to Frances Ward as our Dean on October 15th. I am delighted that on October 16th I could license Bishop Graeme Knowles as the Acting Dean, who will thankfully serve in that role until the appointment of a new Dean for which the interviews will take place February 18th and 19th. I remain hopeful that we will have a new Dean in place during the Summer.

We keep our Registrar, James Hall, in our prayers. He remains off sick, and we pray for his continued recovery. I am delighted and grateful to welcome Stuart Hall, the Registrar of the Diocese of Norwich and our Deputy Registrar, who is picking up the reins here for us. I appreciate very much that he has come down from Norwich to join us today.

I am delighted too that +Mike is with us. He had a medical procedure last week from which he is recovering. The rumour is going round that he has been banned from driving. I need to scotch that – for medical reasons for the time being he is not driving, but he has not been banned!

Congratulations to Lavenham Parish for coming 2nd in the National Parish Magazine annual Awards in the A5 category for Lavenham life – 2nd out of 410 entries.

Our calling is to Christian discipleship. Each one of us is called by God to follow Jesus, to learn to live as disciples in our diverse worshipping communities, and to proclaim our faith to others. This is the basis of everything else in our Diocese.

This is a key text that begins the section on Faith and Discipleship in our "Growing in God" Vision and Strategy document approved by this Synod in June last year. Everything flows for us from this, and it is and will remain the source of our renewal and flourishing as a church. Learning to live as disciples of Jesus Christ is what every one of us who is baptised is called to do. I ask this question about everything I do or am asked to do – is this deepening discipleship, or enabling others to be drawn into discipleship, or am I just being asked to be a bit of decoration?

You may recall that in this same section on Faith and Discipleship, we say this:

We recognise that Christian community is the primary expression of Christian life, where we are formed and grow together in Christ. Worship is vital to this, and so we need to ensure our worship is the best it can be in a variety of styles across the diocese. We will therefore focus resources and training on enhancing the quality of worship across the diocese.

While we were creating this vision and strategy +Mike and I committed ourselves to make helping develop our worshipping life across the Diocese a priority for two years, and I want to say something about that, and about what might be flow next from that commitment.

The quality of our worship, which includes its accessibility and variety, is at the heart of growing as disciples. Our worship forms us, shapes us, teaches us in our developing relationship with Jesus Christ as we place ourselves before God through our study of Scripture, prayer and praise, and the eucharist.

Some of you will have heard me before talk about the first Christian's understanding of worship. For them, it was not a service you went to, an hour on a Sunday morning. For them, worship was their way of life – being a Christian meant being turned worshipfully to God all the time, orientated to God in a state of bowing down, a life honouring and giving praise to God.

It meant that for the first Christians and it can mean the same for us. Our acts of worship, our services, then become the peaks of that worshipful life, the focus, source and resource of our lives honouring God, helping us grow as disciples and renew the church.

When the first Christians did gather it was not for a fixed act of worship. They met for fellowship, to eat together, to study Scripture, to pray and sing, to share the eucharist together, and to talk about their faith and experience of life together. It is a pattern for discipleship I urge all of us to consider, whether all those elements are held together, or distributed across a week or a month or a season.

At its most basic, it means we should treat coffee "after" the service as an integral part of the gathering and our service schedules need to allow the minister to be there for at least part of that time.

Many of you will be familiar with at least some of these elements from early Christian gatherings in models like Alpha, where we have the study of Scripture, prayer and worship, and learning and sharing fellowship together. All intended to help us grow as disciples.

The 18 candidates for ordination that Bishop Mike and I are supporting in their formation so they can serve in their local communities in this Diocese follow this pattern with us every fortnight on a Thursday evening. We gather for three hours for time together that includes reflection on God's presence in our lives, the study of Scripture, learning about our Christian tradition and reflecting on aspects of the call to ordination, eating together, prayer and sharing the Eucharist together. Enabling all of us to grow as disciples.

I heard about a congregation this week, not in this diocese, where Sunday morning has been turned into a three-hour gathering, beginning with morning prayer, then a session to learn new music, then the Eucharist, then a congregational meeting that maybe a time to learn together, or discuss community and neighbourhood actions they want to take, or parish business in place of the PCC. People come for part or all of the morning. The congregation was 15 in 2014 and now is 60.

I want us to be imaginative and creative, to take some risks, be bold, for the sake of our discipleship and to draw others into discipleship. Drawing on the rich traditions of our faith, paying attention to our worship, what we do and how we do it, so that our gatherings together, large or tiny, will be bring us into worshipful encounters with God, to help us grow as disciples.

There are various things going on In the Diocese to help us along this way. You will remember from last Synod the presentation on "In Harmony" the project of the Cathedral to support the development of music across the diocese, led by the wonderful Richard Hubbard. Richard is now working on implementing the recommendations of that report to strengthen the music in our worship.

Many parishes have benefitted from Carl Melville's work with his Family at Worship programme.

We have been running a course this Autumn, called Enhancing Worship, for laity and clergy who lead or will lead worship, looking at the history, theology and practicalities of worship planning and leading. We set up two pilots and an astonishing 120 people are attending this course in two locations.

All this too is to help us grow as disciples.

The Diocese has been chosen to be one of the pilot dioceses for implementing "Setting God's People Free", a national approach to developing discipleship that a number of you heard about in presentations made a couple of months ago. A team, of which I will be part, will be meeting before Christmas in preparation for the first residential for pilot dioceses in January. We hope this will deepen our insights and practices to grow as disciples and renew the church.

Let me now pick up another paragraph from the ***Faith and Discipleship*** section of our Strategy.

We will support the flourishing of all our congregations of whatever size and context, so that they are genuinely welcoming, caring and safe, offer worship that forms, nurtures and strengthens disciples, and are outward looking, making a difference in our communities.

There is a lot in this, underlining what I have just been talking about. But I want to pull out one phrase – *so that our congregations are genuinely welcoming, caring and safe.* Later in this Synod we will hear from the Children's Society about how we can help our children be safe. I hope we will adopt the House of Bishops Policy on Promoting a Safer Church and our Diocesan policy on Bullying and Harassment. Both of these are about aspects of what it means to be welcoming, caring and safe as churches. These are the sort of outer boundary markers to protect people that most people will

never get even close to. But sometimes someone does, and when that happens the hurt and harm is devastating. We need to know in our churches that we have policies and practices in place to assure ourselves and those we welcome that we are as safe as possible, and are properly alert to those behaviours that may be warning signs for someone getting close to perpetrating or suffering abuse or bullying.

I want to return now to what is at the heart of growing as disciples and the renewal of the church. You may well be aware that this week and over the past year many of us celebrated the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther publishing his 95 Theses that is reckoned as the start of the Reformation – of which we all, whether more evangelical or more catholic, are inheritors. The foundations of Luther's reform, his renewal of the church had two dimensions – his practices of the study of Scripture and diligent prayer.

Then look at the beginnings of Methodism – Charles and John Wesley gathered with a small group of friends to study Scripture and to share in a discipline of prayer together. The group became known as the Holy Club. Renewal again from the study of Scripture and diligent prayer.

Similarly, the nineteenth catholic revival in the Church of England emerged from a group who studied the Scriptures and practiced the disciplines of diligent prayer.

The renewal of the church in our day will come from the same foundation. Each one of us and all our congregations learning and praying as we grow as disciples. All engaged in the attentive study of Scripture, studying it together, through practices like Dwelling in the Word, and being diligent in prayer. And as well as being familiar components of our worship, they can become components of any form of gathering we make in the name of our Lord, just as they were for the first Christians.

Mike and I will continue to work in enhancing the worship of our churches. But as the first two years moves to the next, we intend to focus our attention on developing for us all our study of Scripture and our diligent prayer, so that by the power of the Spirit we all may grow as disciples and the church be renewed.