

Presidential Address, Diocesan Synod, via Zoom on 8th July 2020

It is good to meet in this way, as we pause on the road we tread together and I am glad we do so as the first virtual Diocesan Synod. On behalf of the Diocese, I express gratitude and the assurance of our prayers to three colleagues who are moving on: Canon Mandy Ford, Director of Discipleship and Ministry, who has been appointed Dean of Bristol, but will make sure first that our 18 new curates are blessed by her wisdom and encouragement as they settle into their new parishes; Joshua Rey, who has been an exemplary Chaplain and who will be collated as Vicar of Holy Trinity Roehampton on the Feast of St Michael and All Angels; and Canon Stephen Roberts, Deputy Diocesan Secretary, who has served in many distinguished capacities in the Diocese over 31 years and is retiring at the end of the month. I have contributed to more fulsome tributes elsewhere but could not let this moment pass without these few words. I also pay tribute to Paul Morris, retiring as Registrar at the end of the month. When I crossed the great River Thames in 2005 and changed Dioceses the one continuity was Paul Morris, Registrar to both and administering his legal expertise with compassion and wisdom and dedication. Thank you Paul not least for your very good attendance record at Diocesan Synod meetings and for much more besides! We wish you well.

I look forward to licensing Dr Alun Ford currently Rector of Fen Ditton in Ely Diocese as my new Chaplain on 2nd August, I congratulate Jackie Pontin who will succeed Stephen Roberts as Deputy Diocesan Secretary and with the assistance of the Archdeacon of Southwark and the Diocesan Secretary I have reviewed Discipleship and Ministry through

the lens of enhancing Lay Leadership and Ministry. I look forward shortly to announcing Mandy's successor to what will now be Director of Discipleship, Lay Ministry and Continuing Ministerial Development as well as advertising for the IME2 Lead post which will focus on continuing formation and training of our curates. I am glad that Wendy Stephens, our first Licensed SPA, has accepted my invitation to become Diocesan SPA when Gerie Knights retires in October and I express gratitude to Gerie for devoted service to SPAs over many years.

Please pray for the 18 new curates I licensed virtually on 27th June. We enjoyed a virtual day retreat leading to a happy and blessed commissioning for ministry. They will be sharing in the cure of souls in their parishes but yet to be ordained deacon, God willing in September. I am also glad to announce the appointment of Hugh Constant as our new Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser who will be taking up his post in September.

Whenever and however we meet, we are one body, Christ's body, here in South London and East Surrey. And we meet, once again, to serve God and his people in this place, to seek his will, and to work for the coming of his Kingdom.

It has been in so many different ways a challenging few months and we have faced a severe test as a body. For some among us there has been terrible personal loss and much anxiety not least among those who have been the most isolated. We have been reminded that we are part of a global community of interdependent nations, our lives and livelihoods, our health and well-being, our care for the environment

and the future of our planet, bound together in ways we had largely neglected to appreciate. In our own nation many of those on whom we have depended most for the maintenance of essential services have previously been under-valued. Moreover we know that there has been a disproportionate rate of infection and exposure to the Coronavirus among those identifying as Black African, Black Caribbean and Asian heritage within our community.

COVID 19 has not been the only global phenomenon that has had an impact. We have all been challenged to reflect on racial injustice and the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in such shocking circumstances reverberated around the planet, strengthening the resolve to confront such wrongs and not just say but demonstrate by action that #Black Lives Matter.

We are all rightly proud of the efforts of those who have been on the front line, ensuring that our National Health Service has not been overwhelmed, with our Hospital Chaplains very much to the fore, ministering to and caring for those affected by the Pandemic which was responsible for plunging us into lockdown in the middle of March. One of my first actions was to invite the Diocesan Secretary together with the Archdeacon of Lewisham & Greenwich, the Director of Communications and the Dean to join me in forming a Coronavirus Task Group which has helped to navigate the Diocese through these challenging weeks and I am particularly grateful to Canon Wendy Robins for her labours in producing the regular Bulletins which have been much appreciated.

I acknowledge the imaginative and creative ways in which our Parishes and other worshipping and praying communities have gone on being the Church in such changed circumstances. This has been about worship, much of it on-line, as well as outreach to the most needy in our communities. This has ranged from many small acts of loving kindness, pastoral care and neighbourly concern which have sought no recognition to the magnificent response to a vastly increased demand for food banks and meal delivery services.

I put on record my gratitude to Diocesan Staff and colleagues who have led, enabled and served the Diocese as a whole with dedication and devotion during the Pandemic. I have been grateful that our Area system has served the Diocese well with Bishops and Archdeacons and Area Deans working hard to support our parishes. The Archdeacons have committed to a daily pattern of praying together at lunch-time when they have been joined by the Diocesan Secretary as well as Evening Prayer - you are right to guess this has been numinous and zoominous!

The determination of Parishes to honour their pledges to sustain mission and ministry, through the Parish Support Fund, during these last months has been inspiring. We walk alongside our Parishes, serving them, enabling them to serve their communities through the ministry sustained by the Parish Support Fund. Over the next few years we are committed to moving towards two thirds of our parishes supporting one third. Currently it is the other way round. This tough but necessary path will I trust enable the mission of God as it is worked out in our Parishes, Deaneries, Schools and communities across the

Diocese to go forward in life-enhancing ways. We received the good news a few days ago that we are the first Diocese to have been awarded funding from the Church Commissioners to recruit a Giving Adviser.

I thank the Diocesan Secretary for taking forward a review of central costs so that we can strengthen partnerships with our Parishes in resourcing mission and ministry mindful of the pressure on our finances. This has involved reducing the number of posts, regrettably involving some redundancies as well as the redistribution of work. The result is a reduction in central costs which we hope next year will contribute to lower ministry costs when parishes come to make their Parish Support Fund pledges. We are committed to the principles of Southwark Vision which envisages a covenant relationship of trust with our parishes.

I have been struck by the flourishing of volunteering across the Diocese and delighted that with the progress our Lay Council, now firmly established, is making. We will be developing our affirmation and development of Lay Leadership and Lay Ministry in new ways.

Like the rest of the country, we are moving from crisis into a less perilous but more complex period as we feel our way into the new context. This has been accompanied in recent weeks by the lifting of restrictions with clergy able initially to re-enter their churches to stream or record worship albeit behind locked doors, then their re-opening for private prayer and on Sunday much joy for those limited numbers who were able to join congregational worship once again.

We will do this as carefully and safely as possible. I give thanks that a good and increasing number of our churches are re-opening for worship. I am also aware that clergy and congregations have experienced real trauma and stress, and it is now, when we are in this transition from crisis to recovery, when the immediate pressure eases off, that these things will come to the surface. We must take good care of ourselves and of each other and I have encouraged clergy to factor in their holidays in making their plans for re-opening; just as I say the same to all who have borne the weight of these recent months.

Moreover, as we emerge from crisis mode, we will not lose sight of the good lessons we have learnt. On-line meetings may have their amusing moments as the unexpected is broadcast widely; but in reality there is much that has been truly life-changing and life-giving in the different ways of worshipping with which we have experimented.

For those whose mobility is impaired, or who for other reasons find it hard to leave their homes, they may be transformative. And as well as sustaining praying communities in our Parishes they have also drawn in new worshippers. We must be attentive to the possibilities. Let us not speak of “going back to normal” but of going on into the good places God has prepared for us to walk in together, both old and new.

So let us be of good courage and hope-filled as we move forward, yet not neglecting to look around us at the others in our pilgrim band who may need a helping hand with the burdens they carry, or a rest to refresh themselves before walking on. As we have always done, and always shall do, may we go on together, our hearts on fire, loving God walking with Jesus and led by the Spirit. Amen.