

Presidential Address: Diocesan Conference 25th September 2021

It's such a great privilege to meet together today. We meet as those on-line and those here in our mission-oriented school of St Teilo's – thank you Ian to you and your staff for your hospitality.

I always look forward to Diocesan Conference and I'm excited by what lies ahead of us this morning. After coffee we get three opportunities to be inspired by the way the Diocese is going forward, following God's lead. What I have to say now I hope will feel like an introduction to each of those three Vision workshops.

The sense of it being a privilege to meet has been mightily reinforced for us when we think of the year we've just experienced. Last September we gathered wholly on-line for this event and were justifiably proud of the way, even as a large gathering, we engaged with each other on screen. We did Diocesan Conference at home.

We were yet to travel through a difficult winter with Christmas celebrated minimally, severe restrictions on our buildings, the necessity of risk assessments, arduous cleaning rotas, no singing, missing congregants, and deaths we grieved.

I was talking to one of the clergy in the West of the diocese last week who told me that of the about 40 people on the electoral role of one of his congregations, I think it was 12 of them had died in the course of last winter. More than a quarter of his regular worshippers had gone to glory in just a few isolating months. We must allow ourselves to recognize that it was a hard year and, although we count our blessings, like so many others our parishes have had to work diligently just to cope.

So, the first thing I want to name this day is that you have done brilliantly.

For all you have sustained and achieved in this last year, I want to celebrate today the parishes of this diocese. I know it has been really tough but please don't ignore all the small miracles of ministry which you've kept in place, sometimes at considerable costs to yourself. You have kept the faith. You have sustained the offer of Church burning bright when your own resilience was probably low. You have offered worship in Church and frequently on-line – I

think of those joining in Morning Prayer each day on Zoom in the East Vale Ministry Area (legally inaugurated last Sunday).

And speaking of Zoom you have adapted to the experience of praying remotely and from home. An experience which has sometimes had its rather bizarre elements. I remember how, in the middle of licensing a cleric to their ministry and leading that liturgy wholly on Zoom, I suddenly noticed that one of the on-line congregation was a lady in a dressing gown, who was making supper in the kitchen whilst presumably she took part in the prayers on her iPad. I guess it's just a new form of multi-tasking!

As we heard from Mike Lawley, you've honoured your giving and paid your fairer share in the face of all the pressures on you. The sheer scale of what has happened to us in 2020/2021 needs to be acknowledged and I'm left with a sense of admiration and deep appreciation which I hope today we can celebrate.

Whilst the pandemic took its toll, so much has happened.

- Clergy have started new jobs: amongst them it has been terrific to welcome Paul Booth, our Vision Programme Manager and Tim Jones, our Director of Ministry, both of whom you'll see later in one of the workshops (they're the good-looking ones with the hair), and Rod Green the very new Archdeacon of Llandaff. (He's the good looking one without the hair!)
- We've said farewell to some as they've looked with new eyes at their lives and moved on, or into retirement. Amongst them we will say goodbye to our Director of Education, Andrew Rickett, at the end of the year and we wish Andrew well as he leaves an Education team in very good heart – again you'll hear more of their work from some of Andrew's colleagues in another workshop. Thank you to Andrew for all he's achieved on our behalf.
- Communities have been served and prayers offered. The sense we might have clung to last summer that Covid would 'be all over by Christmas' proved to be a vain hope and we needed to attend to people's mental health and the well-being of life in our communities. I think of the food share programme being run by many parishes, for instance by St Mark's, Gabalfa and Aberdare St Fagan's, who've combined it with a school uniform project this summer, or St

Winifred's, Penrhiwceiber with their period poverty and baby basics schemes.

- The world has been reset and the Llandaff Diocese has been adapting and responding and I want to thank you. In so many ways I see examples of adaptability, dynamism, sustainability, solidarity and humility. Matt Batten, our Director of Communication and Outreach, does his best to show what you have been about, especially in our weekly Llandaff Matters e-bulletin, but he is always keen to hear about things which may seem small to you but which tell a joyful story and inspire others.

I've talked of the world being reset this last year but the truth is, as we know, that the world had begun a fourth industrial revolution long before Covid hit us. There are massive shifts happening, like tectonic plates in the earth's surface sliding in a new direction, which are certainly as dramatic as what happened to this part of Wales in the 19th Century as industry and technology reshaped people's lives afresh.

How we work, how we consume, certainly how we communicate: the applications of artificial intelligence and algorithms (terms most of us wouldn't have known a few years back), the advancement of robotics and nanotechnology, from genetic engineering to the nature of commerce: who can doubt that our world is being transformed. And you add to that a global health crisis and a climate emergency, and we all have much to learn.

And yet we are also in the business of Christian transformation, and of not being afraid, of offering a vision of Jesus to our communities.

We know that the world, our neighbours and friends, need a living faith in Jesus Christ if they are to move from where they are to a place of greater life and freedom, if they are to be sure of lives free of anxiety.

The world needs us to take note of what is happening to it and to respond with the offer of faith as it longs for kindness and mercy and compassion, for beauty and truth and joy.

And in this reset world we stand for the importance of strong community. I spent a day last week at an event at Swansea University. When we finally elect a new bishop for Swansea and Brecon I have to find a moment to break the news to him or her that Swansea have built their new university site in our diocese! This was an event involving people entirely at home in the world to

which we are heading and who operated digitally long before we were forced on-line. And yet there was a huge recognition that what is going to be needed for us to be transformed well is strong communities.

Which brings me to the Vision of the Diocese and all that is being achieved to work towards ourselves being a network of strong and transformed communities.

I've said this many times over the last year but the main purpose for our move to Ministry Areas is to ensure that we protect and develop *parish* ministry, that we continue to build a Christian response around *local* communities. That we live, as Christ lived, embedded, invested, incarnated in the here and now of our place.

Strong local church combined with a reduction in bureaucracy, planning for mission, learning together about our faith, and a conviction that Young Faith Matters. That's what we're about. Our Vision declares that we're enhancing lay leadership alongside priestly ministry. One of the great encouragements of this last year has been the College of the Lay Chairs and the College of Treasurers and the Ministry Area Transition Teams.

Anxiety was expressed on Thursday about us not being able to find volunteers who would be willing to carry the responsibilities of the Ministry Areas. I understand that concern, but I must tell you that one of the consistent joyful stories of this last year is the willingness and the calibre of lay people wanting to take leadership roles in our Ministry Areas.

By the 1st January all the tough bits, the legal deeds will be in place and then the really interesting work starts. Each Ministry Area works out its own style, its priorities and its speed of operating. What transformation does this Ministry Area Council want to bring about, specific to the area it serves?

Again, another message I have reinforced throughout the year is that nothing about this move is motivated by a reduction in clergy numbers. On the contrary we're having more transparent and proactive conversations about how the Ministry Areas are to be resourced than I think the diocese is used to, and we've consistently run recruitment processes which have attracted new clergy into the diocese. Clergy are critical to the church's strength and growth. And I want to pay tribute to our clergy who are faithful and hardworking, resilient and creative. Llandaff is proud of its clergy, and I constantly appreciate their wisdom: my senior colleagues, the Area Deans, Ministry Area Leaders,

Vicars, Self-Supporting Associate Priests and our curates. We are so blessed with them.

Would the clergy in the room please stand - and I'm going to ask the lay members of Conference to give them a thank you clap for all they have achieved this last year.

In addition to the new Ministry Areas we are powering ahead with the Young Faith Matters aspect of our Vision.

We're addressing the lack of engagement we have those under 35, those we call the Millennials and Generation Z, who think entirely differently about how the world operates. We are resetting our ambitions towards the young, and with the help of the Evangelism Fund creating a team to help schools and Ministry Areas to work on new schemes of outreach. That's what one of our workshops will showcase later this morning and I know you'll find inspiration in what transforming young people is about.

Once Ministry Areas are in place I'm going to challenge each one of them to think about how it can expand its offer of worship to appeal more to young people. Is there a church building in which the young themselves can lead a congregation because that's how faith comes to matter to people, we catch it from others who are like us, who speak our language and become our friends. There are new resources to help us do that. It's not as hard as you may fear.

So there are two forms of strengthening our communities in the year ahead.

To grasp the opportunities of your Ministry Area which, far from threatening our parish life, is there to sustain and develop it. And to embrace all the opportunities that Young Faith offers right across the whole diocese.

It's an invitation to engage better with our world and our society as it goes through the next global revolution. For we're not here to attend to our own comfort, to serve ourselves, or simply take care of our current congregations. We're called to minister to new audiences, especially those who have yet to feel the transformative and compassionate love of God. Christ's call to us is to grow faith, to make new disciples.

My friends, by the mercies of God let us be transformed by the renewal of our minds, by the stretching of our imaginations and stirring of our spirits, by our collaboration with one another, so that we may together discern what is the

will of God – what is a joyful story, what grows his Kingdom, and what builds our capacity for good, to his glory and in his name.