

DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE: DIOCESAN SYNOD

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS GIVEN ON SATURDAY 13TH MAY 2023
AT A MEETING OF THE DIOCESAN SYNOD AT NEWCASTLE CATHEDRAL BY
THE RT REVD DR HELEN-ANN HARTLEY

My starting point is gratitude to God for his calling to this role, and for all of you, for the welcome and care you have extended to Myles and to myself. Words of thanks are due for the way in which the episcopal vacancy has been held, for all who work and volunteer tirelessly to enable God's mission to flourish, so often in ways that don't attract attention, but which make God's Kingdom known across the diverse communities of our diocese. I would like to pay tribute to Bishop Mark, to the bishop's staff team, and to the staff in Bishop's House and to Shane and colleagues in Church House.

I'd also like to thank Dean Jane for her ministry here in the Cathedral, it is immensely valued, and it is right that I mention this here in my first address to Synod; thank you Jane and all the team here at the Cathedral.

Amongst the many kind cards and gifts I have received in the last while is this copy of the Psalms. It was handed to me on the day of the inauguration of my ministry by a representative from Worcester College Oxford. It came from Dick Smethurst who was the Provost of Worcester where Myles and I were once students. April 22nd was a long day, and it took me until later in the evening to open the wrapped gift. I took the book out of its holder, opened it, and read the inscription inside.

*For Alec
From Dick
5 September 1964*

*Later
For Alec's most worthy successor
From Dick
22 April 2023*

Dick Smethurst had himself been a student at Worcester and gifted the Book of Psalms to his then chaplain, Alec Graham who, as we know, went on to become the 10th Bishop of Newcastle. One of Alec's executors was a contemporary of Dick's at Worcester, and when he was clearing out Alec's books, he came across this copy of the Psalms and recognising the name of the donor he returned it.

Inevitably, I am aware of *all* the Bishops of Newcastle that have gone before me. Their photographs hang in the office in Bishop's House, and the desk in my office belonged to Ernest Wilberforce the 1st Bishop. My first episcopal role in Aotearoa New Zealand taught me many

phrases of indigenous wisdom, one such being that we face the future with our back to it. This is not to say that we ought to be burdened by what we carry with us into the future, rather in acknowledging what has gone before, both challenging and joyful we learn from the past as we make our way in a new season. In his analysis of the Psalms, Walter Brueggemann describes them as consisting of psalms of orientation, of disorientation, and of new orientation. One commentator suggests that while 'no schema will ever contain the rich diversity of the psalms (as Brueggemann himself acknowledges), the movement from orientation to disorientation to new-orientation is not only evident in the psalms, it is fundamental to Christian life'. There is no doubt that the Church as an institution like others continues to face ongoing challenges of sustainability. The reality of societal, national, and global issues are the waters we swim in, and what resource we have is held and used within the pressures of this wider context. Amid all of this, we are called to search for the last, lost and least, valuing all God's children in equal measure, driven by a vision of how the world can be not just how it is. Last Saturday's Coronation reminded us how the Church of England has a unique vocation to be the Church *for* England, and as such a Christian presence in every community. The parish structure is a treasure. How we resource it sustainably is an opportunity that never goes away and does require difficult questions to be addressed. You will hear me say the word 'opportunity' much more than the word challenge. Naming reality should always be an opportunity for growth and development. We need to know the white lines on the pitch to help the game flow smoothly and creatively. Clarity is everything and you will hear that word a lot from me also.

I once held the youth portfolio for the NZ House of Bishops which immersed me in the vibrant life of diverse cultures, including the Diocese of Polynesia that placed growing younger at the heart of its missional life, largely because these island nations have been at the fore-front of the climate emergency for some time, and are as a result acutely aware of what may be left to current and future generations; and doing this with far less resources than we have. Acknowledging the challenges of the pandemic season that have been both revelatory and catalytic, growing younger and more diverse should not be necessarily about scale or specific age-range (in some contexts, growing new Christians who are in their 40s and 50s is more realistic); achieving *any* of this growth is much more about **intentionality, resourcing, and vision**.

I have heard musings on what it is to share faith with a NE accent, but I wonder if accent is sometimes used to perpetuate a 'them and us' mentality, when what is needed is an appreciation of our different *dialects* which honour the different contexts in the diocese, all woven together singing to the same tune? Threads that are bound together are stronger than in isolation. This is why the Deanery Development work is both key to our future but is also a profound illustration of the Body of Christ at work in the present.

In July last year, General Synod witnessed a powerful debate on affirming and including disabled people in the whole life of the Church. The first bi-annual report of the Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice was published soon after. The LLF process has been a response to a call for justice in our diversity. What I have discerned in all of this, is that as the Church turns ever more outwards in mission and ministry, and becomes younger and more diverse, it changes (*we are*

changed). This is surely a sign of the fullness of God's Kingdom. We have nothing to fear, and everything to hope for.

The **commitment** to be a Church turning outwards in mission and ministry, and younger and more diverse is **characterised** by:

SEEKING through *being* Open to God's transforming love;

SHARING through *being* Generous with God's transforming gifts;

SENDING through *being* Engaged in God's transforming work in the world.

These values of **seeking**, **sharing**, and **sending** are **enabled** by **intentional resourcing** in our use of *current* resources and projects: supporting the deanery development work; and *growing* resources, taking advantage of the new national funding period seeking locally-based development opportunities, particularly those that might be nurtured by collaboration across parishes, deaneries and dioceses; this connects with the importance of **attentiveness to our diverse contexts**, civic and business relationships, education and public-sector contexts *along with* local challenges (like access to reliable internet, affordable housing, and transport); and from that attentiveness to context, **effective partnerships** and **no silos!**

There are already *many* examples of creative mission endeavours across the diocese, a good number of which I have witnessed at first hand already. There are opportunities to be proactive, identifying where fresh engagement might be possible, and partnerships that might lead to **reimagining ministry**, with new Christian communities or different ways of configuring ministry locally, leading to revitalisation and renewal. Much of this is to the fore in the Deanery Development work, and this will continue to form a key part of our strategy in this new season, discerned locally, refined in consultation and supported centrally. The work of our Board of Education and our Church schools is also a vital aspect of our life together, as are the many excellent and creative partnerships with community, non-Church schools. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Canon Paul Rikeard and his team for all that they do.

The vision for turning outwards in mission and ministry and becoming younger and more diverse is **embedded in our diocese** by **building confidence in belonging and believing**, lifting morale; being realistic and hopeful about finances; communicating effectively making information on the diocesan website more stream-lined and accessible, reflecting the vision; encouraging local creativity; equipping clergy and lay together, and nurturing vocations, lay and ordained especially amongst under-represented groups. The desire, to be blunt, is to enable every person to live and tell the good news of Jesus Christ, grounded in the five marks of mission. It will change us and our expectations, and I encourage each of us to be open to that change.

I want to turn briefly now and say something about governance.

I used to think that governance wasn't the most exciting topic, until I became involved in the early stages of the National Church's recent governance review process. How our structures and governance function can get us into a real muddle; get it right and clarity and confidence abound,

and that can help people engage with the issues, have good and healthy debate, and ultimately grow God's Kingdom. It's worth giving attention to, and I will be initiating a review of our governance with some suggested outcomes gleaned from my episcopal experiences over the years.

Our Diocesan Synod is where matters of policy, resource or direction should go to for presentation or agreement. Let this Synod be a place of good and wise listening and engaged debate! Likewise, Deanery Synods, engaging with local issues, bringing motions to this forum which could end up on the floor of General Synod and impacting and shaping national policy and initiatives.

I am proposing Bishop's Council becomes the Diocesan Board, which will consist of Council, the Board of Finance *and* the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. These three are statutory, and their terms of reference must be observed. The incorporation of the Mission and Pastoral work into a newly formed Diocesan Board is key because it means that decisions about reorganisation are properly held and engaged with at the centre rather than kept in a silo off to one side; I am grateful to Liz Kerry who is embracing this proposal with energy and enthusiasm; thank you Liz. The Mission and Pastoral work will be largely carried out by a delegated committee, but it will report back to the Board for any discussion and decision-making.

Bishop's Staff has no statutory function or rights. I bring together my senior colleagues in order to keep an overview of (a) diocesan business, (b) those decisions for which bishops and archdeacons are legally responsible (licensings, vacancies, and so on), (c) the initiation and discussion of policy or initiatives which might then need to go to the Board or Synod. In my experience, it is wise to use Bishop's Staff to try things out and argue the virtues or otherwise of potential initiatives and business in order to test viability, desirability, and so on. This is why the BSM needs people who will argue well; immediate colleagues take note!

Nine-and-a-bit years of episcopal ministry have taught me about the vital importance of pastoral care and listening, with patience, challenge, and a determined hope in the Gospel, holding things together, bringing clarity and confidence, matching boldness and courage with humility and patience. It has also taught me much about getting licensed appointments right; placing a priority on clergy wellbeing and development; ensuring safeguarding is shown the highest regard; the importance of supporting and building-up a senior team; and using intelligence from networks and relationships I already have at the national level for the sake of the diocese *and* feeding insights from our diocese *back into* those national conversations to help shape policy and priorities.

The language we use is important; 'growing church bringing hope' has served us well, but it's now time to retire its use with gratitude. I invite us to be outward-facing in our approach, mindful of how others may interpret the words and phrases we use and the values we proclaim. *Seeking, Sharing, Sending* is I hope an invitation to connect and strengthen communities and partnerships in mission in our worship, hospitality, and service.

In 2032, the Diocese of Newcastle will celebrate its 150th anniversary. A commitment to turn outwards in mission and ministry and become younger and more diverse is a hope-filled headline to direct and inspire the season that lies ahead. We have an amazing story to share about Jesus, and of God's love for every person and place and the heritage of our Northern saints. How we engage and grow a Church that is younger and more diverse should be achievable in rural multi-church benefices as much as in coastal towns. Our diocese ever-turning outwards in mission and ministry and becoming younger and more diverse can surely do that with renewed confidence. Sisters and brothers in Christ my invitation is for the whole diocese to help me take ownership of this vision, to make it real for you and for all our communities, churches, chaplaincies, schools, parishes, and benefices, seeking, sharing and sending together.

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed, Alleluia!