

## Bishop Ian's Address to Diocesan Synod, 2019

Dearly beloved friends and members of Synod:

After nearly five months in the Diocese, it still feels like an unexpected and astounding privilege to be here with you today as your bishop. I want to thank you for the trust you have placed in me to serve you in this ministry, as I want to thank God for the grace to do it. By that grace, I am now on a journey with you as a pilgrim in this great Diocese, and my pilgrim prayer is that God will lead us nearer to him and closer to his kingdom as we travel on together.

I find I am doing so many things for the first time - such as chairing a Synod. At this stage of life doing anything for the first time is exciting. But being a bishop has its more difficult aspects of course. For a life-long parish priest type like me it is not easy to leave behind the rhythms of prayer and community that go with that calling. And it is not easy to find yourself face to face, every day, with the realities and limitations of the institutional church.

In fact, an article in the current SEI Journal (available free online) suggests that "the role of a bishop in a diocese ... is a contested field of clashing expectations ... Without some serious attempt to take our bearings, the life of our new bishops promises to be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

However, I'm very happy to say it really isn't that bad. In fact it is rather wonderful to be involved in the lives of so many faithful communities and committed clergy, to be sharing some of their challenges and failures as well as their joys and achievements, and to be supported in doing this by so many people.

I owe them all thanks: Dean Kenny Rathband, Provost Hunter Farquharson, Convener of the Administration Board John Ferguson Smith, acting Director of Ordinands Alison Peden, and of course Bishop's PA and Office Manager Carol Aitchison and her Assistant Eleanor McGourty. You are a wonderful group of people on whom I have come to rely utterly.

I also thank all the clergy and their families. It is not easy to represent the Church in these times, and you are being faithful in prayer, ministry and dedication to your congregations. I am also grateful to all the retired clergy and self-supporting clergy and lay readers who do such valuable work in our charges. Your commitment is evident to everyone.

I must thank all our volunteer office-bearers and committee members in the Diocese. They are all giving of their time and expertise to make good things happen.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and my wife, Canon Carrie Applegath. You gave up a lot so that we could come here, and you keep me sane, and eating sensibly!

### ***Episcopal***

'Episcopal' comes, of course, from the Greek "*episcopo*," meaning 'a viewpoint' or 'oversight.' A bishop - an *episcopos* - is called to study the view carefully, and help those on the ground to know that they are part of a bigger picture.

As I visit each charge and meet the ministry team, vestry and congregation, and as I get to know each community a little better, that bigger picture becomes clearer and more detailed. So far I have visited about a third of the charges, and have met many people on their patch. I'm looking forward to visiting every congregation some time during the year.

It has been a moving and encouraging experience for me to see how different people are responding to the same kinds of challenges and opportunities with faith and hope. Many are seeing declining numbers and rising age profiles, but not losing faith. Others, with equal faith, are working to meet needs in their local community and enable their growth as a church. As I said in the

sermon earlier today, quoting Cardinal Newman, “Heart needs to speak to heart” to encourage and support each other. That is what a Diocese can do, and what a Bishop is for.

From my *episcopo* viewpoint, I can also see when things are coming over the horizon and getting closer to us, such as:

### ***Lay Ministries***

We have been welcoming several new clergy and lay readers to the Diocese, and more are on their way. They, like the colleagues they are joining, are one of our greatest resources. They provide leadership and learning, care and commitment, vision and presence, and we need them.

But many of our smaller congregations do not have the financial resources to support more than part-time professional ministry, and they depend on the care of our retired and self-supporting clergy and lay readers. They also have lay members who willingly step forward to assist in leading worship and offering pastoral care. It is becoming clear that the Church needs to provide training and support for such lay ministries, which will be easy to access and locally delivered, and which will lead to episcopal authorisation and ongoing support for the people who are doing them. The SEC is looking at the provision of such training in the near future, and I will welcome that as meeting a need I can see in many of our charges.

Once this has been established, I hope that we can have something like a Diocesan ‘Festival of Lay Ministry’, bringing together all those involved in such ministries, to share experience and meet others engaged in the same ministries around the Diocese.

### ***Lent Appeal 2019***

This year’s Bishop’s Lent Appeal is being launched today, and you have the sample flyers with information of the two causes we are supporting, Aberlour Child Care in Scotland and the St John’s Hospital in the Middle East. Please order as many copies of the flyer from the office as you need, or print them using the pdf that is being sent to each charge. The flyer includes internet links for each cause, where more information can be found. Please encourage your congregations to use the Lent Appeal as the focus of their ‘almsgiving’ this Lent, and as a way of turning outwards in the season of turning to God.

### ***Lambeth Conference 2020***

Every ten years the Archbishop of Canterbury invites all the bishops of the Anglican Communion to meet at Canterbury. The next one is in late July next year. The Lambeth Conference is a visible sign of the diversity of the Communion that the SEC is part of, and where many of the churches are actually more like us than the CofE - smaller, usually not wealthy, but playing a big part in the life of communities in each country.

In the week before the Conference the bishops from around the world are invited to visit dioceses in Britain and Ireland, to visit congregations and communities, and to share in their hospitality. I hope that this Diocese would receive four bishops and each Area Council would welcome one of them, to show them our life and to hear about theirs. I hope that some of the bishops I have already been talking to will be able to come, bishops from Brazil, India, Canada and Melanesia, and that some of them may continue the relationship as link dioceses with us, in the same way that Kolkata has been in the recent past.

### ***Year of Pilgrimage 2021***

The College of Bishops has declared 2021 a Provincial Year of Pilgrimage, encouraging us to make a journey of faith of some kind. Over the coming year I hope we will take the opportunity to begin planning a number of pilgrimages for 2021.

This could include:

- Walking a pilgrim route, ancient or new, or visiting a holy place: we have many re-opened pilgrim routes and holy places in the Diocese, and this is an opportunity for us to rediscover them.
- Congregations travelling together to visit another church in their Diocese or Province: I would like to plan, over the course of 2021, to walk from one charge to the next, with people from each charge coming along with me for their stage of the pilgrimage.
- Planning and making a major group pilgrimage: I would like to think about a Diocesan visit to the Holy Land, encountering not only the traditional 'holy places' but also the people who now live in that land of conflict.
- Making a spiritual 'journey of the heart and mind' at home: I hope people will use this to enable those who are less mobile or physically able to make their pilgrimage and be included.

### ***Brexit***

None of us knows what is going to happen in a few weeks time as the UK leaves the EU. What we do know is that it is causing and will continue to cause division in the country and anxiety among people who have come from other lands to settle here. Many of them have made homes and lives here, and now feel uncertain about being welcome or able to stay.

Whatever our view of Brexit, the division, fear and hardship being caused cannot fail to make us want to support people somehow, and to provide a place of hope, as well as the relief of hardship. The aftermath of Brexit, whatever shape it may take in local communities and the country as a whole, will need reconciliation and healing. With all the uncertainty and confusion, and with feelings running high in some places, I urge every local church to be ready to be such a visible place of hope.

### ***Worship and Mission***

Worship is one of the clearest visible signs of hope that we can offer. Worship should be the best we can be. It represents us, to God, but also to others. It is our first response to the Love of God we ourselves have received, and it enables us to try and make that love the basis for our own day to day living, as persons and as a society, and to share it with others.

Worship belongs to all of us, not to the rector or the worship committee. And worship is for the world - liturgy means 'work for the people' - because, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others."

That means that worship, like everything else, should face outwards to the community beyond the church door, as well as to God. In fact as Jesus taught us, the one leads to the other - 'Love God, love neighbour.'

I think that needs to become very apparent in our worship, perhaps rather more than we realise. After all, we go to worship hoping it will do *us* some good, make us feel encouraged or spiritually fed. This is not a bad thing, and it isn't incompatible with our worship being more outward facing. That doesn't necessarily mean making worship more 'entertaining,' or 'relevant.' It does mean things like looking at what our intercessions actually pray for (not ourselves and our needs, but the needs of the world outside). It means being hospitable, not just with coffee afterwards, but with kindly help to the newcomer to find the place in the book. It means making a place for children to feel welcome when they come, even if children are not there every Sunday.

"Casting the Net," as an emphasis in the Diocese, helped many congregations begin to think in this way about their worship as well as other aspects of their life. It was not meant to be yet another church programme to be organised and responded-to by busy, overstretched and sometimes exhausted people. But some perceived it like this, I think. This is a pity, because 'mission' is not in any sense an extra, 'bolt-on' activity that has to be added on to the 'normal' things a church is doing. It is, rather, simply a different way, a truer way, of thinking about everything we do as the Church - worship, as we have said, but everything else, even cleaning the church toilet, setting the church budget, and meeting in the Diocesan Synod.

In any case, mission, like faith, like prayer, like the kingdom, doesn't start from us or our efforts. It starts from God. Mission is God's project, not a church project, nor is God's mission only about what happens in Church. God is active in the world, so that mission, as Archbishop Rowan Williams famously said, is "seeing where God is doing things, and joining in."

We saw one example of that this week at the clergy study day in Kirkcaldy, where the High School's LGBT+ Support Group, young students and their teacher, led us in an afternoon of learning and reflecting about the experience of LGBT+ people. They showed us how they as young people want to help the older generations, who sometimes find this all so new and difficult. "Seeing where God is doing things, and joining in."

Mission that runs through everything we do is also about sharing our faith, of course. Mentioning this in most church groups makes the anxiety levels in the room start to rise. Christians have not always shared their faith well or wisely. But if we do not find ways to tell the story of Jesus to people, who will they hear it from?

A church I once preached in as a guest, had in the pulpit a little card directed at the preacher which quoted S. John's Gospel: 'Sir, we would see Jesus.' If you're like me, you've failed too often to let people see Jesus in your words, as well as in your actions. To help them know the story behind Christmas and the story behind Easter, the story behind everything we do in church, and behind everything we are as its members. The story of Jesus, who shows us in his life, teaching, action, death and resurrection, that God is love and that we are loved. How will people know this if we don't tell them? How will they understand it if we don't show them?

A few months after Justin Welby was made Archbishop of Canterbury, he was asked by a journalist, "Why do you keep talking about Jesus?" He replied, "I am the Archbishop of Canterbury, it is what I do." It is what we do, or help each other do.

As you know, I like modern parables. So here is one. I don't know the identity of its original author, but for today let's call it "Casting the Net:"

There was a fishing club in an area of many streams and lochs filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Over many years, the members of the Fishing Club gathered in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, how they might go about fishing, and just how many ways fishing could be defined.

They searched constantly for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. They loved thoughts such as "Fishing is the task of every member," and "Fishing is the heartbeat of this club." They held special times called "Fishing Fortnight" and "Fishing Season." They called costly international conferences to discuss fishing and hear about other traditions of fishing in other lands.

The Club built large, beautiful clubhouses dedicated to the sport of fishing. And the members agreed to form a Committee to run the Club and its affairs, made up of those who had the vision and courage to speak about fishing, to define fishing, and to make decisions about the rules.

One thing the members didn't do, however, was actually to fish. They didn't ever pick up a rod and line, or a net, and go and cast it in the river or the loch. They had forgotten how to do it, even how to do it badly, like beginners.

After one stirring meeting on "The Need for Fishing," a young person left the meeting, and actually went fishing. The next day she reported that she'd caught two large trout. She was honoured for the excellent catch, and it was arranged that she would visit all the gatherings of members to tell about how she did it, and show the photos. She did this so well that she soon had to give up fishing to devote time to talking about fishing, and to join the Committee.

You might feel that this Synod is more like the Committee than the Loch. But if 'fishing' - or mission, facing outwards, being for others - is in *everything* we do and *everything* we are, then

the business we have been dealing with, and the business of your Vestries, is about managing the resources God has given us so we can do what God needs us to do:

- Look for where God is doing things and join in.
- Tell the story to let others see Jesus.

Jesus, the one who said,

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

“Cast the net ... and you *will* find them.”