



## **Presidential Address**

### **Diocesan Synod March 2021, Bishop Rose**

January 1961 (D.O.B.); April 1961 (baptised); June 1982 (admitted to the office of Evangelist – Church Army); April 1983 (married); August 1986 (first child is born); March 1988 (second child is born); June 1990 (adopted our son); June 1991 (ordination to the diaconate); April 1994 (ordination to the priesthood); November 2019 (consecration as a bishop); November 2019 (Installation in Canterbury Cathedral). And just when I thought nothing else of extra-ordinary significance could happen in my lifetime, we had the Coronavirus pandemic. 2020 was supposed to be the year that I spent visiting every deanery, getting to know you, the clergy and lay- leaders, up and down and right across the diocese – just getting a sense of how the land lies. Changed lives → Changing Lives, was still ringing in my ears. I had embarked on a journey with the strong belief that this was the right place to be – to walk alongside lay and ordained people who are open to embracing what it means to be a disciple of Christ; constantly engaged in changing lives conversations – committed to our changed lives, changing others’ lives.

But without warning, three and a half months into my time with you and with little time for preparation, we were hit by a pandemic with catastrophic results. We watched as all our neatly planned certainties - “this is how it is done or this is how we have always done it” was simply thrown out the door. With Covid-19, we have all had to move with some agility; some with no technical experience found themselves creating and hosting online worship; most things moved online: study groups, PCC Meetings, APCMs and even funerals are being live streamed (I attended the funeral of The Reverend Paul Rush’s wife that way). We have also had to figure out how to reach those without the ability to connect and how to respond to the increasing social needs. The conversations I was having with lay and ordained across the diocese identified these concerns. Add to this, the ongoing concerns around our closed church buildings, issues around maintenance; church hall closures which meant a dramatic reduction of income locally, and thus impacting on the ability of many local churches to meet their financial commitments.





I am proud of the way we have pulled together and worked as a diocese. It felt like our communications department did not sleep as almost daily we were being kept updated with the latest covid-19 communications from the national church; we also had numerous communications around managing re-entry to our buildings. Together we began to discern what the spirit may be saying to us, the Church here in Canterbury Diocese, and our communication also included overwhelming and sincere thanks for all that you and your colleagues (clergy and laity alike) have been doing during lockdown.

A surprise thrown up by Covid-19 lockdown was that several churches', despite their drastically reduced numbers prior to lockdown, digital services were now attracting larger numbers to worship! What are the implications for us of this? Post lockdown, how do we enable those who have joined us digitally to feel a sense of belonging? How do we nurture discipleship amongst our added numbers and those already attached? Teaching them to pray and to study the scriptures; how do we teach them to live generous lives, to care for creation, and to be ready to live and share God's good news in words and deeds?

This is what lies at the heart of our mission! But how do we resource this mission? As bishop with responsibilities that I share with the archdeacons, I have to prayerfully address the present "Pre- & Post-Covid-19 reality." It is a reality that shows us that we have been living unchecked beyond our means for some time, and in some instances, we have been operating in a 'business as usual' mode even as our congregational numbers continued to decline. While the pandemic is not the sole cause of the challenge we are presently facing, with our buildings being closed for a significant period, it has become the catalyst for us to seriously grasp the nettle and address the difficult questions that normally some would not have dared to ask.





Questions about *how we resource mission and ministry in our diocese*; whether it is *sustainable to have the numbers of buildings that we currently have*; questions about the *kind of lay and ordained leadership needed* throughout the diocese; questions about *the need for more collaborative working*; questions about *how we use Readers, ALMs, SSMS, PTOs and Interim Ministers and the kind of support needed for our stipendiary clergy*; questions about *how we release the whole people of God to be engaged in mission*; questions about *how we train and equip both lay and ordained*. Questions about what is the *right level of support that is needed from the centre* and whether *the centre is the right place for all these resources to be located* or should some be located at *deanery or archdeaconry level*.

Deanery M & Ms were invited to intentionally help us with this reflective process because this was never intended to be a top-down process. Nor was it about a new inexperienced bishop coming into the diocese and creating change for the sake of change, or to make her mark. As your bishop, as a senior staff team, we needed to know what your questions were and whether together, we were asking the right questions to take us forward. From the beginning, my interest and that of the senior staff team has always been about enabling mission to be at the forefront of the life of the diocese. Together, we all needed to be engaged with regards to the shape this Mission should take in our diocese. More than ever, we need to re-imagine a sustainable and flourishing ministry together.

We also looked to the wider diocese to engage in this discernment process. In the latter half of last year, *the golden threads* coming back from across the diocese highlighted areas such as: Us being changed by God, through worship – renewing our concern for social justice and being a more outward facing church concerned with people; having our priorities reshaped in relation to our buildings; asking where the voices are of our children and young people; deepening our faith so that we may grow as disciples; the need to care for our creation and for a more simpler and uncomplicated structure that is fit for purpose.





I want to thank our Area Deans, Lay Chairs and everyone who has contributed to this discernment process. From some of the correspondences received, it is clear that this has indeed been a costly, demanding and challenging process for us all.

I have received communication from members of PCCs: some suggesting that this is not the time to be engaging with such a process – I ask:

*If not now then when?*

Others saying how good they have been, paying their Parish share so why should they lose their priest or indeed share their priest - dare I ask:

*What kingdom are they helping to build and do they know that they belong to the wider body beyond their parish boundary?*

Others have asked should poor churches not have a priest because they have no money – my response:

*Poverty should not equate with a lack of ministerial leadership and indeed we have targeted funding from the Church Commissioners – the Low income Community Fund - for exactly these areas.*

Others have asked for reassurance that their hard working priest not be under threat of removal - my honest response is:

*There was never a threat of removing priests – the deanery plans showing savings in the deanery by reducing clergy numbers have come from the deaneries themselves but I must make it clear that our present income does not and cannot sustain the number of stipendiary clergy we have in post or for filling future vacancies.*





Our largest expenditure in the diocese (60%) is on the clergy (this includes their stipends and associated costs of housing, pensions and community charge). We therefore cannot entertain clergy or lay leaders encouraging their PCCs to withhold contributing to our shared costs (the “Common Fund”) or directing them to create and hide separate accounts or worse yet, for the clergy to be collecting their stipends month by month without fail, while preventing or discouraging the parish from giving to the Parish Share (our “Common Fund”) because of holding, for whatever reason, so-called differing theological views. I am reminded of the parable of the talents. The person with only one hid it instead of ‘stewarding’ it. The generosity that I practice and speak of is one in which we ‘steward’ all that God gives to us. This is not an optional extra that if we feel in a good mood or feel like it, then we might just oblige and give a little more from our leftovers. The generosity that I speak of is one which should be embedded in our way of life together, hence for example, there is no reason why together we should not all make a special one-off gift to assist us in balancing the budget for 2021-2022 (thereby preventing the kind of cuts that could in both the long term and the short term be damaging to our mission).

We have been looking forensically across all our expenditure, seeking how best we can make today’s church pay for today’s church. I must share with you that even with the proposed (projected) savings being put forward, we are still showing a significant gap in our budget! Within Diocesan House we are examining the proposals of where savings can be made. In doing so we are conscious that some areas are statutory and cannot just be eliminated to save on costs - but even in these areas we are looking at the tasks to be done and how we might allow the task to define the size of the team needed. Where the department or framework is not statutory, we still must examine how it contributes to the wider mission and possibly dare to ask if there might be another way to deliver it (at a deanery or archdeaconry level)?





We have a strategic vision for mission and ministry in our diocese. It is one that envisions new ways of doing things; addressing training needs; deepening discipleship; developing strong local leadership (lay and ordained); modelling God's generosity; engaging in issues of social justice and the creative order; ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of all we do; enabling our deaneries to become centres of ministerial excellence. These will not just be words. I believe in making our vision statement a reality in our diocese (and Archdeacon Andrew will be sharing with you shortly on this).

The deanery plans are being prayerfully assessed across the board within the context of creating a sustainable and flourishing ministry. This will form part of a working diocesan plan. We know that no one size fits all and therefore we will need to ensure that whatever action we take brings us closer to being a flourishing diocese with a balanced budget. Know this, that we all bear the cost because we are part of the one diocesan family (there are no them and us). There will be difficult decisions to be made: some short-term others in the longer term but we will not run away from making the tough decisions we are faced with.

Pilgrimage is significant part of the DNA of our diocese. We have embarked on this journey of re-imagining and becoming a sustainable and flourishing diocese. Any pauses (and notice, I did not say stops) must be for re-fuelling, for restoration and renewal. We have begun with what feels like a sprint but in reality we have embarked on a marathon – we journey together. We will carry each other when needed - no one part of the body arrives until we all arrive. No one will be left behind.

