

Presidential Address – Diocesan Synod 14 March 2026

Friends it is now 13 months since I legally became your bishop, and it is hard to imagine a more tumultuous time in our world than this season. Having emerged from the Covid pandemic, the number of serious and escalating conflicts in the world very sadly continue and the fragility of many of the things we have all taken for granted for much of our lives seems unprecedented. Over the next few minutes, I want to remind us of our calling, the character of our God and our responsibility in the face of such challenges.

I begin by once again saying what a privilege it is for me to have come to love and know the diocese of Coventry and serve alongside all of you. I trusted that it would be a positive move for me and though God has never promised easy in the course of my ministerial life, he has always proved himself faithful and granted me a deep love for the people I am called to share ministry leadership and life with, within the course of that ministry. Coventry has so far been no exception.

There are three things I want to talk with you about this morning:

- Wars and rumours of wars
- Senior appointments and structural change
- Holy Communion and the common cup.

These may seem unconnected and some ways they are but, in a way, they cover the layers of ministry we share:

- International and national life
- Diocesan life
- Local witness and practice.

So, first to the big picture:

Wars and Rumours of Wars

Matthew 24:6

You will hear of wars and rumours of wars but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

(Mark 13:7 Luke 21:9)

I don't know whether you are in the habit of watching the 10-o clock news. In the days of constant media feeds in some ways that feels a little less necessary these days but if you do it is hard to recall a news bulletin that did not begin with something that feels like the echo of these scriptures. It is sadly 4 years on since the beginning of the war in Ukraine and I know many have supported and continued to support those directly affected by this terrible tale of conflict over land. If you have not yet watched the film Mr Nobody against Putin, I highly commend it to you. It tells the story of the impact of this

regime from the perspective of a schoolteacher in Russia, and we know the story goes on of oppression and violence and loss of life affecting civilians. In the Middle East a land many of us will have visited and prayed for the peace of Jerusalem over many decades and we see a level of hostility and violence which has not been seen for generations, and we grieve the loss of life of innocent people caught up in this deeply entrenched conflict. Then the latest horrors of Iran again directly affecting many of our people who have come to call Coventry home, I have confirmed several Iranian individuals who have sought refuge and asylum here in our own diocese directly as a result of what is taking place in their home country. You will have heard the testimony of Bishop Guli, of Chelmsford, whose own brother was a martyr in his 20s as they fled the horrors in 1979. There are many other places in which this kind of atrocity is taking place, and it is important that we stay engaged and do not take our peace for granted. That our story is one of reconciliation born out of a courageous decision back in 1940 to choose peace rather than revenge leaves us a legacy we cannot ignore. I know that many of you seek to live this message within your own lives and ministries day by day, all year round. It is my hope that we reclaim this as a core aspect of our diocesan life and vision going forward and that we take very seriously that call to be peacemakers who have been reconciled to God through Christ and therefore long for and work for reconciliation with one another for the sake of the world and above all prioritising a deep desire to help and enable people who are far from God to be reconciled to Christ.

So, this is simply a call to us synod to be those who are agents of peace in a hostile world. We must each make our own response to the conflicts around the world, but we must above all pray and work for peace and do all we can to share the message we have received with the wider world.

As we walk forward together during lent and face the darkness of good Friday once again it is my prayer that we might also put to death hostilities within ourselves and endeavour to seek the future that God has for us as reconcilers and peacemakers in the name of Christ our lord.

Senior Appointments

So, to my second matter which is senior appointments, this flows nicely on to mention our dear colleague Dean John Witcombe. Sadly, Dean John isn't with us this morning, this would be his last Synod and had I known that it was his last Synod last time, I would have perhaps made a little bit more of it person, but there will other times, of course, to give thanks to John as he's engaged so wholeheartedly in the ministry of Reconciliation, not just here in Coventry and of course at the cathedral, but right across the world in the name of Coventry, which is a really impressive ministry and a really important gift that we share with the world. So, it is important that I put on record a deep and profound thanks to John as he prepares for his retirement. There'll be other times to say more and if you'd like to know about dates in which you can share in that farewell, please do look

on the website at the cathedral, there will be a special evensong on May 17th at 4pm where John will lay down his cope as it were, in the cathedral.

Let me share in response that we have three very significant appointments in the public domain right now. On Monday we shall interview for our next DDE as April will be retiring at the end of August. April is with us this morning, but this isn't her last Synod because there's one more in July and I'd like to say a little more then, if I may. We have a strong field of applicants for which we thank God as they seek to take the work forward that April has done so faithfully throughout recent years. The Dean of Coventry was job of the week, there is such a thing, in Church Times last week and we shortlist in April and Interview in June. The Bishop of Warwick pack went live yesterday and the expressions of interest and the opportunity to suggest names was in the Church Times this week. We shortlist in May and interview in late June.

You will also know that following careful and lengthy consultation, I have made the decision to move to geographical archdeacons of Coventry and Warwick as the next step in refreshing our structures for better connection between parishes and church house team and senior staff. This is in response to all that we heard on 12 deanery days and has involved current post holders. Ven Barry Dugmore has since been appointed to Archdeacon of the Isle of White and begins his ministry there at the end of May and will be on sabbatical until then. I want to wish Barry well on our behalf as synod and especially to him and Suzanne in their next season as they return to serve a diocese they know well and have described as returning home. Rev Tim Cockell continues through the transition in his current role, and he has been well supported to ensure his full involvement in this time of change. I'm very grateful to him for his patience and faithfulness as he has held this role since July 2023. We are drawing up role descriptions, and these will be advertised in April as we would hope to have appointed for a September start. In the meantime, I am grateful to the rest of the archdeacons' team for all that they are carrying and other members of church house staff who are carrying extra responsibilities in the light of our current situation.

Given all these roles, which are very significant for the life of our diocese, I'm going to do something a little unusual now. I ask you to pray with those around you for these appointments. I have described this a strange process and would certainly not have chosen to be doing all of this at once but it does feel like a moment of opportunity in which the Lord is bringing people and arranging us in such a way as we can be the most fruitful in his service so if you would pray for a few moments for the Diocesan Director of Education, The Dean, The Bishop of Warwick and Archdeacons that would be very much appreciated.

[Address pauses for prayer]

Holy Communion

Finally – to that which unites us – the life blood of our lord Jesus. In view of the wide diversity of practice regarding the administration of Holy Communion, I have in my last two bishop's letters, been trying to provide clarity and guidance about the expected practice at communion around the common cup. For some this is simply not an issue but for others it has been complex, so I want to share with you what this means in practice. I have not simply come to this myself. I have consulted colleagues and especially those leading within the liturgical commission to get legal and pastoral advice. I have asked that this practice be in place by easter day so that there is time to discuss and agree as church communities and with PCCs where that is needed. This is not for the avoidance of doubt ignoring the needs of the most vulnerable it is precisely to protect, care for and include all God's people.

I have asked that the common cup be reintroduced by Easter day 2026. I do understand that are some very specific circumstances in which this is especially difficult for certain individual communicants. For clarity these are the expectations around such cases:

- 1.** That the common cup is expected to be the norm – the usual way by which most receive at administration.
- 2.** Receiving in one kind (whether bread or wine) is a full receiving of Holy Communion. As Common Worship puts it, 'Communion should normally be received in both kinds separately, but where necessary may be received in one kind, whether of bread or, where the communicant cannot receive solid food, wine.' This means where a communicant:

Declines (for a good reason such as health, to consume from a common cup)

Or where a communicant is unable to consume solids (e.g. in communion of the sick)

Or where there is an allergy or intolerance to gluten and/or alcohol, where low gluten/dealcoholised alternatives are not available.

- 3.** Receiving by 'simultaneous administration'/intinction by the person administering Holy Communion.

In this case my practice has been a very small amount of wine being consecrated in a separate small chalice (because intinction into a single chalice will increase the risk of contamination not only by means of fingers, but also for anyone with a gluten allergy or intolerance) and this would then be offered alongside the bread which is intincted by the ministrant and not by individual communicants.

It is also important to say that intinction should not be the normal means of administering Holy Communion for all in a parish.

In respect of the use of individual cups, the guidance of the Legal Advisory Commission states: ‘... it is contrary to law for individual cups to be used for each communicant, or for an individual communicant... Even if a shared cup cannot be used for medical reasons, the use of individual cups remains contrary to law and there is no legal basis for a minister to make alternative provision of his or her own that is itself contrary to law. In such cases reception should be in one kind only.’

To be clear, both the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship teach that that for whatever reason, 'Believers who cannot physically receive the sacrament are to be assured that they are partakers by faith of the body and blood of Christ and of the benefits he conveys to us by them.' in other words, 'Spiritual Communion' is a perfectly valid way to participate in the Eucharist.

I hope that this serves to clarify. Moving forward, we will refine our guidance around Holy Communion and other matters of liturgical practice and make it available on our website. For now, I would be grateful if all those with responsibility for liturgical practice in parishes use this guidance as the basis of the conversations taking place.

Friends thank you for your understanding in this important matter. I would add that I especially look forward to sharing in the chrism service around the lords table at what will be dean johns last and my first present with you on April 2nd it is hoped that as many of you lay and ordained will be there and you can find more information on the diocesan website.

In the meantime, thank you for all that you bring to our common life please pray for me as I also pray for you in this significant season as we trust God for the future for he is faithful and he has promised he will be with us always to the end.