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Bishop Ruth's Ordination Charge to the Deacons Michaelmas 2021

I came home from the College of Bishops this week with a tree. Each of us have been given one to plant in the run up to COP26. It is part of the Queen's Green Canopy which both gives thanks for her 70-year reign and marks our commitment to the future of our planet. I hope to plant it at one of our schools and will be encouraging the children to go and harvest seeds from our local trees which they can then grow in a pot ready to plant next year. I doubt they will need much encouragement. I've been struck by the way it is our children and young people who have led the way in showing us the need to care more deeply for our world. We adults often think that it is our task to teach them but we need to listen more and learn from them! They notice things we miss.

You have had the opportunity in these past few days to get in touch with the world around you, to understand more about what God is now calling you into. Listening to those with passion for soil, bees and sheep, will, I am sure, have inspired you as you engage with the ministry of a deacon. Seeing the world through the eyes of an expert, someone who knows a thing or two about soil, and bees, and sheep, opens our eyes to see what we may have overlooked.

You will have given much thought to the words of the ordinal about what a deacon is called to do. I know that many of you have been struck by the challenge to "*reach into the forgotten corners of the world that the love of God may be made visible*". I have encouraged you to reflect on what may be the forgotten or hidden corners in your own experience, and to step into those places. Challenging you to step out of your comfort zones and see what you might discover.

We, the Church, need to recognise there are many who feel forgotten, neglected, overlooked. We can become so focussed on the needs of our own community that we have little time to reach out beyond our walls. The work of a deacon is all about reaching into those forgotten corners, reaching out to the overlooked. However, this isn't about giving you more things to do. Please don't think that. This isn't your work but God's.



What we hear in the ordinal is that it is in reaching into those forgotten corners that the love of God can be made visible. I am not sure that it is us that carry that love there, although I hope we are people who clothe ourselves with love in the words from Colossians that we have been reflecting on as a diocese and which you will hear again tomorrow. I think rather it means that God's love is revealed, it becomes apparent to all who are there. Because the work of mission is God's, not ours. We are merely the heralds, the proclaimers, the agents. He is the one who reached into our world with his love. Coming as one of us to a world that had forgotten.

So, my Charge to you is not intended to add to the list of things that you and your incumbent have already created in your ministry agreement. There are plenty of boxes to tick and learning experiences to be had. Rather I want you to focus on these words:

"Deacons are to be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God's presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us."

This is an attitude, a charism, a way of being. Prayer is at the heart of all we do. As we enter into a conversation with God, with its silences as well as its words, so we discover more of his heart and see through his eyes. And that is when the kingdom is revealed!

I pray that you will each be gathering seeds of faith, planting them in the fertile soil of hearts and lives of those around you, and in time, seeing the shoots and fruits of the harvest which God has invited us to join in reaping. And as you do so, may God reveal his love, which is as deep for you as for anyone else!

+ Ruth

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