

## The Archdeacon of Northampton's Charge 2022

What is the collective noun for Archdeacons?

Maybe an 'Intolerance of Archdeacons' or a 'Faculty of Archdeacons.'

What is the collective noun for Churchwardens?

Perhaps, a 'Longevity of Churchwardens' or a 'Stickability of Churchwardens.'

Legally speaking, Churchwardens are Bishop's Officers.

In reality, they are frequently a generous gift from God.

At their best, Churchwardens are an island of grounded common sense in a sea of 21<sup>st</sup> Century ecclesiastical uncertainty.

Too poetic? Well, in Winnie the Pooh terminology,

- Churchwardens can be Eeyore (you know who you are)
- They are sometimes Tigger (again, you know who you are)
- But they are often AA Milne ...

the one who is in possession of the big picture ... the whole story.

Thank you Churchwardens ...

- You are the ones who grapple with the mysteries, complexities, frustrations and madness of Historic England and the Victorian Society.
- You are the ones who climb onto the church roof in the pouring rain with the architect or brave the flooded underground boiler room – again!
- You are the ones who set an example of regular prayer and worship.
- You are the ones who, with the priest, are often the focus of unfair criticism – but, like Henry Cooper, you take criticism on the chin and when forgiveness is needed – you splash it all over.
- You are the ones who stand with your incumbent through thick and thin – supporting one another and caring for one another. And if you don't, you should.

Thank you. Keep it going.

It is wonderful to be back together for these Admission Services – face to face. Zoom was handy, but there is nothing like the encouragement of meeting together. We stand together. We stick together.

There are 2.3 billion Christians in the world – one third of the world's population. The church is growing faster in parts of Africa, South America and Asia than we could possibly have predicted.

But in Western Europe in general and the UK in particular, Autumn is here and Winter is coming.

These are tough days to be a church leader.  
Churchwardens, you are church leaders.

We need to stick together.

Did you enjoy those beautiful words from the Book of Ruth?

*“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.  
Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay.  
Your people will be my people and your God my God.  
Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.  
May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely,  
if even death separates you and me.”*

Stick together in your church ... in your benefice ... in your deanery ... in this diocese ...  
Where you go I will go.

Or those words written to the Colossians:

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved,  
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.  
Bear with each other and forgive one another  
if any of you has a grievance against someone.  
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.  
And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

- Love one another
- Forgive one another
- Encourage one another

We don’t only stick together. We love one another.

Why? Because Jesus gave us two commandments:

*Be united and love one another.*

They are commandments not polite suggestions. Think Capt. Mainwaring not Sgt. Wilson.

There is no room for division in the church.

Jesus says that, unless we forgive one another, God will not forgive us.

*I once reminded a Churchwarden of that. He replied, “Well, Jesus didn’t mean it, did he?”*

That is a great way of bypassing awkward bits of the Bible!

We dare not ignore the commands of Jesus. More is expected of those in leadership.

Your copy of *Archdeacons’ Visitation News (AVN)*

is available to read on the Diocesan Website.

Yes, it still sounds like a guest publication from ‘Have I got news for you.’

There are all sorts of articles in AVN that are tailor-made  
for Churchwardens in the Peterborough Diocese.

If you have been Churchwarden for 100 years  
and would actually like to know what a Churchwarden should be doing  
(but you feel it is a tad too late to ask), take a look at AVN.

Sometimes being a Churchwarden feels like a long haul.

So, when you feel you've had enough of ...

- conning the Archdeacon into granting a List B instead of a Faculty
- mending the mower or rehanging the gate
- thinking about dented downpipes or clogged gutters
- updating the Log Book in time for the Archdeacon's Visitation to convince him it really is a useful, living document ...

Remember ...

It's not about faculties. It's all about Jesus.

If you forget everything else, remember that.

As I close ...

My thanks to Cheryl Goddard, who was my PA until Easter.

And now, my thanks to Chel Cullen, who has the immense challenge of being PA to both Archdeacons. Thanks to the vast majority of Churchwardens who worked happily and helpfully with Chel over the Admissions process. She really appreciates your positivity.

Or as Paul would say:

*"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."* It's all about Jesus.

**And finally** ... I was recently reading an 18<sup>th</sup> Century memorial in Abington Church.

*In memory of a justly valued, revered and beloved parent, John Harvey Thursby, Esq.*

*His conjugal and paternal affection exemplary;*

*His social virtues numerous, his disposition amiable;*

*His candour great and his benevolence universal;*

*All his virtues were founded on that Religion the truth of which*

*he professed firmly to believe,*

*and the duties of which he constantly endeavoured to fulfil.*

In great contrast, his wife is unnamed and the memorial simply says,

*What sort of woman she was, the last day will determine. ...* Wow! What happened there?

To an extent, my sisters and brothers,

it doesn't matter how we are remembered on our

Chancellor-approved, ecclesiastically sanitised headstone.

The important words will come from the Lord:

***Well done, good and faithful servant.***

**FOOTNOTE:**

The Covid years have been tough for the church. If you would like company as you seek to reimagine God's church for post-lockdown times, why not contact one of the officers at Bouverie Court?

Here is a link that will take you to the right page on the Diocese of Peterborough's website:

<https://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/aboutus/diocesan-staff-teams/>

Why walk on your own when you could have company for the journey?