**Presidential Address**

**Diocesan Synod**

**November 2019**

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

As a theme for this presidential address I want to take the idea of hope. To some, I appreciate, that might seem a little ironic on the day we propose setting a deficit budget, which might seem a rather hopeless thing to do. But by contrast it is precisely because we face challenges that we must be people of hope.

Hope is an essential element of the Christian faith. Hope for the Christian has a specific meaning and a specific usage. It is much, much more than a vague yearning for something good in the future. It is a firm conviction about what it is to come: firm because the future, our future, does not depend on us, or on chance happening or on circumstances. Our future depends rather on our good God who loves us and has nothing but good plans for his people.

Our Christian hope depends upon what God has already done for us in Christ, as Paul makes clear in those words from Romans. And it is because of what God has done in the past, in Christ, to reconcile us to him, and to usher in a whole new world, a whole new creation, that we can have hope for the future.

Hope therefore is much more than a vague longing: it is a spiritual discipline. It is our duty and our calling, in an often hopeless world, to be people of hope ourselves. Indeed to be personal for a moment it is a key part of my own personal calling. Long before I was called to be Bishop of Truro, at the earliest stages of considering episcopal ministry, I felt that if I were called to be a Bishop it would be to be an agent of hope. And I still feel that very strongly, so that when people ask me what they might pray for me, I always ask them to pray that my own hope will be kept high. Hope is a spiritual discipline. I commend it to you.

Christian hope is a confidence in what God will do in the future. It is not simply a reaction to what we see around us. Nonetheless there are signs of hope around us, signs of God at work amongst us and we should allow ourselves to be encouraged by them. We should let them build up our hopes. So here are some things to encourage us, to give us hope – and it’s not an exhaustive list.

Just this last week Cornwall Council agreed to invest no less that £612,000 in the Truro Lifehouse project based at All Saints’ Highertown, as a significant part of the wider development of Highertown, Gloweth, Threemilestone and Langarth. That is a tremendous vote of confidence in the church as a very significant partner in community development and transformation and a tremendous vote of confidence in Jeremy Putnam and the many, many people who have worked hard with him on that bid. It think it’s inconceivable that even a few years ago the Council would have entered into such a partnership and I think it’s a real sign of hope that now they are ready and willing to do so.

Many people in other dioceses look with envy at our own Accompanied Ministry Development programme and the impact it has had and is having. One particular thing to note I think is that in general the quality of relationships between clergy in this Diocese is very high (not always of course, but generally so). People tend to act much more collegially and collaboratively than they do in other dioceses, but it hasn’t always been like that and the change is due in no small part to AMD. That bodes well for the future and that too is, therefore, a significant sign of hope.

We continue to have a good number of people exploring ordination. And they are not just ‘good’ in number but in quality too. But the numbers are encouraging. It’s been the habit over the last few years to have an evening at Lis Escop just before Christmas where we welcome all those in training or exploring ordination. This year though there are so many people that we’ve had to spill out into a second evening. And that too is surely a sign of hope.

And I can add to that the good news that one of our own ordinands, Tom Ebbens, has been the leading light in establishing for the first time a chaplaincy team for the Marine and Coastguard Agency, for whom he works: and that too is surely a sign of hope.

Dr. Tim Ling’s report ‘God for Cornwall’ focusing on children and young people, which we’ll look at in a moment, makes for sobering reading, even though there are some signs of hope in that too. But alongside the challenges I want again to remind you what wonderful places our church schools are. Indeed just recently I went straight from a county primary school to a church school and the contrast in feel and values was palpable. Now of course some wonderful things happen in county primary schools too and I’m delighted that we are working to support them as well. But our church schools are real places of hope, and I hope that our involvement in the Growing Faith project will help us to be much better at maximising the links between our church schools and our churches: something many of those schools are crying out for.

It was in the second of those two schools I visited that I presented Beth with a certificate for winning our Christmas card design competition. When asked why she portrayed Jesus in the manger as she had, she replied, without a moment’s hesitation, ‘Because Jesus is the light of the world’. And if that isn’t a sign of hope I don’t know what is.

I’m also hopeful about the outcomes and outputs from the five groups who are looking at our five key priorities areas: that we should be a church that conspicuously celebrates children and young people at its heart; a church that unashamedly embraces an innovative and pioneering culture; a church that is increasingly confident in its calling; a Church that rejoices in strong, warm and mutually encouraging international links; and a church that rejoices in the generosity of God. Those groups will report back early next month and I’m genuinely eager – and indeed hopeful – about what they might have to say. I’m not expecting them to pull rabbits out of hats and their work will no doubt lead to more shaping and development but I am nonetheless hopeful about what lies ahead

And lastly let me also say that I’m very hopeful about the outcome of the appointment process for a new Bishop of St. Germans. We have a shortlist of three impressive candidates and I would be surprised if we were not able to make a very good appointment as a result.

But all that said, Christian hope is not about the adoption of the ostrich position. It does not ignore uncomfortable reality. That is quite evident from what Paul writes to the Romans: *we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

Christian hope does not ignore uncomfortable reality. Indeed Paul’s claim is that uncomfortable reality can actually *produce* hope, because *suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.* So the *way* we address our challenges is absolutely essential. Hope is not the handmaid of inaction and passivity. Rather it is hope that should lead us to address our challenges with energy and imagination.

Which brings us to our finances. I want to say to you very clearly that passing a deficit budget without taking any action to address that deficit would be not only irresponsible it would be, in every sense, hopeless. It would be a hopeless thing to do. So let me outline for you the areas where we *are* taking action.

Having devolved responsibility for MMF allocation to Deaneries, the Episcopal College is continuing to work closely with Rural Deans on implementation, analysing the challenges and discerning best practice. In particular we’re clear that this must not just be about slicing up an ever decreasing cake but also about how we grow the cake: we must be attending to growing the cake as well as thinking how we slice it. And if Deaneries are not producing plans for growth then something is amiss.

Secondly our two Archdeacons Audrey and Paul are developing a plan to address issues of long term underpayment of MMF. There are many reasons why that should be, but I think we should all be assured, as a Synod, that everything is being done that should be done, and that appropriate financial responsibility is being taken seriously at a parish level. I’ve said it before but I’ll say it again: the headline figures conceal as much as they reveal. There are significant discrepancies in payment that cannot simply be explained by local measures of poverty and wealth.

Thirdly we’ve had recent contact with the Church of England’s excellent stewardship adviser and we will be drawing more in the future on central support and advice. There is no point in our trying to reinvent the wheel here when innovation and best practice is being pioneered elsewhere.

Fourthly the group looking at encouraging us to be a church that rejoices in the generosity of God will shortly report back along with the others. Of course I don’t know what they are going to say, though I will be discussing with them shortly an idea for us to have a Thanksgiving Day across the Diocese - and in general, as we reflecting at our last Synod, I’m sure we do need to discover a lot more about joy in our giving. We should *rejoice* in the generosity of our God. And in that light I do want to reaffirm a commitment I’ve made to you before not to make us feel guilty about our giving, because guilt is such a bad motivator.

Fifthly, and in the light of what I’ve just said about the generosity of God we should recognise that as a Diocese we are not poor, but incredibly rich. As the balance sheet you’ve been sent shows we are asset rich. We are asset rich, even if we are income poor. We must not succumb to a myth of poverty that is so sapping of hope. And we must not panic. We are to be people of hope.

And I do want to say this: we are not in crisis. We face a challenge certainly, but we are not in crisis. I have spent 12 years of my life leading entirely self-funded organisations (of which this Dioceses is not one) and I believe me I know what crisis looks like - and this isn’t it. We are not in crisis but we do face significant challenges we must address. But above all we should rejoice in the generosity of God and recognise and be thankful for the many ways in which he has blessed us.

And sixthly and perhaps most radically at Episcopal College we are looking seriously at what shape our Diocese might take if we only had the income we currently have and did not budget for a deficit. That would of course mean that we would be spending less than we currently are, which would inevitably mean we would be employing fewer people than is currently the case. And of course that would impact Church House as well as the parishes.

But that said we should not be afraid to use financial challenge to imagine a different future, precisely because challenge can produce hope. Who knows what God might be saying to us as we address those challenges about what future shape we should take? Indeed the theme for our upcoming EC residential is exactly that: ‘Reshaping the future’. I am absolutely convinced that our God is committed to his Church in Cornwall because he is absolutely committed to Cornwall. But that does not mean he is committed to any particular shape or structure. After all the Celtic Church in Cornwall which was so very fruitful in mission was radically different in shape and structure from the church we know today: it did not for instance have parishes. They came much later.

But I do want to be very clear that if we do reshape the church in this Diocese – and I’m not necessarily saying we will – but if we do reshape the church in this Diocese it will *not* be to balance the books, it will be because we believe we are hearing and heeding the call of God so we are better shaped for the mission to which he calls and which he entrusts to us.

Christian hope looks challenges squarely in the eye and does not seek to duck them, because it is in the addressing of those challenges, in hope, that God’s promised future can emerge. And I do want to say in closing that I think it is absolutely essential that today we be people of hope. Hope is in very short supply in the wider world and this country is sadly and tragically divided – and that division has been driven I think by a real uncertainty and insecurity about the future, by a lack of hope.

And that can be a particular challenge in Cornwall too. Material poverty is real and troubling: witness the number of foodbanks that are run across the Duchy, meeting a real and pressing need. But a poverty of hope, a poverty of aspiration, can be particularly challenging, because where there is no hope in a community then change becomes almost impossible.

But we have a hope that is steadfast and certain. We have a hope that looks challenge straight in the eye and does not seek to ignore it or to duck it. We have a hope indeed that is formed and forged through challenge. So let us look forward in confidence; let us move forward in confidence; let us tackle our challenges in confidence; confident in our God, in all he has done for us and in all he has for us. Let us look forward above all in hope: let us look forward and move forward in the hope that our God alone can give us. Amen.