



The Saints' Way

Towards a narrative, theology and strategy of diocesan mission and ministry

1. A Narrative:

We in Cornwall¹ are inheritors of a remarkable and distinctive Christian heritage stretching back many centuries, possibly to the very earliest days of the Christian faith. This is a land where the gospel has been shared with passion and commitment, and at risk to life and limb, from the days of Piran and Petroc through to the days of John Wesley, Henry Martyn and Billy Bray, to name just a few. And just as the good news has been shared within Cornwall, so it has been shared far and wide beyond these shores. This too has been a place of imagination and creativity which has significantly shaped the wider world. We are happy inheritors of that heritage.

And above all else, this has been a place which God has blessed richly, in which he is still imparting his blessing, and where he will do so in the future. He is at work here already, before us and beyond us. The challenge to us is to join in with what he is already doing, and to play our part faithfully in the story that he is still shaping here in the beautiful part of his creation that is Cornwall.

Thus our prayer is simply this: that we become an ever more hopeful, confident church that seeks the mind, heart and will of God for Cornwall, for the communities he calls us to serve, and for the wider world beyond these shores.

How are we to be such a church? We will be so by being true to Christ and by drawing deeply on our heritage.

In the mission context in which we find ourselves we will be true to our Celtic inheritance. We will be people of prayer, holiness and generosity, responding to the wind of the Spirit leading us out beyond ourselves, seeking fresh and innovative opportunities to love and serve and share.

And we will be true to Christ by seeking in our obedience and devotion to him to ensure that his loving, transforming presence is made manifest amongst us through the quality of our community and our common life.

And all the ministry we exercise, whether lay or ordained, will be undertaken with that aim above all in mind: that Jesus Christ in all his glorious reality may be known, loved and worshipped in, through and beyond his Church.

¹ Not forgetting St. Giles on the Heath, Virginstow and the Isles of Scilly

2. Theology:

What are the theological foundations upon which the narrative above stands?

The task of the Church of God in every time and in every place is to make Jesus Christ known in the context of each particular time and in each particular place. This is an imperative inherent in the incarnation of Jesus who was himself born in first century Palestine. Our task then is to make **Christ** known in our particular **Cornish context** in the third decade of the 21st Century. That must be the focus of our life and ministry together.

To reflect more specifically on those two:

a. Christ:

Because the Church is in itself the Body of Christ, we are called to be the most Christ-like Church we can be, expressing most faithfully the presence, mind and heart of Christ in all we say, do and are. We are called to reflect in mind and heart and hand the passions and priorities of Jesus.

Our 'Five Priorities' help us to do just that. Thus we are to be:

'A Church that conspicuously celebrates children and young people at its heart,' because Jesus placed a child in the centre as a model for us all;

'A Church that unashamedly embraces an innovative pioneering culture,' because Jesus is 'the pioneer and perfecter of our faith'² who in his incarnation, cross and resurrection crossed every boundary;

'A Church that is increasingly confident in its calling,' because Jesus was wholly obedient to his Father's will;

'A Church that rejoices in strong, warm and mutually encouraging international links,' because we proclaim that Jesus is Lord of all, and his Kingdom knows no boundaries;

'A Church that rejoices in the generosity of God,' because Jesus trusted wholly in his Father's provision.

A Christ-like Church will, in particular, seek to *'reach the young, serve the poor and care for the earth'* because we believe those things are particularly close to Jesus' heart.

So we are called to take with utmost seriousness our identity as the Body of Christ: a community in which each member has a part only they can play, using the gifts only they have been given, so that Christ is known and made known in, through, and beyond the community that is his Church, as we commit ourselves to *discovering God's Kingdom; growing the Church.*

The purpose of all ordained ministry is to enable the whole people of God to fulfil their calling as the Body of Christ, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for*

² Hebrews 12:2

*building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*³. And the entering of the whole people of God into their God-given ministry, that Christ be made known in our midst and in our world, must therefore be the prime focus of our ordained ministers.

And the purpose of all ministry - both lay and ordained - is to enable the glorious, transforming reality of Jesus Christ to be known in and through his Church.

b. Cornish Context:

There is strong evidence to suggest that the Celtic tradition was much more effective than the Roman in evangelising Britain⁴. The conditions that prevail in Britain now, with a culture increasingly distanced from the Christian faith, are arguably closer to those of the 6th and 7th Centuries than at any time in the intervening period. At the same time there is perhaps a greater consciousness of - and pride in - Cornwall's distinctive Celtic heritage than ever before - a pride that extends towards a stewardship of creation deeply rooted in the heritage of a land surrounded by the sea.

There is every reason therefore to 'lean into' that heritage and history, learning from it, and being renewed in the light of it.

And to draw more deeply from our Celtic inheritance, and be more effective in mission, we should be:

- more pioneering and adventurous
- more attentive to holiness of prayer and place
- more communal than organisational
- more open to wonder and expectant of the miraculous
- more caring of creation
- more committed to learning and growing
- more willing to express and explore our faith in music and the arts
- more content to be on the margins
- no less local in our focus but broader in our horizons.

Thus our distinctive past should set the trajectory for our prophetic future.

c. Christ and our Cornish Context:

Before our churches, which we rightly love, were built across Cornwall, Celtic Christians gathered around the high crosses which were dotted around the country. The crosses our Celtic forebears erected were not empty, but unapologetically proclaimed the crucified Christ at the heart of their faith: *'They weren't meant to be talked about in terms of aesthetics but to symbolise Christ and the Crucifixion. They were put up literally to stop people in their tracks.'*⁵

³ Ephesians 4:12-13

⁴ See e.g. 'Recovering the Past' John Finney 1996

⁵ Ian Bradley, 'The Celtic Way' 1993

June 2020

What would the equivalent be in our day? I am deeply persuaded by these words of Lesslie Newbigin:

I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross?

I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it⁶.

The challenge we face is to ask God the Father so to inhabit our Christian communities by his Holy Spirit that they become so evidently expressions of the glorious reality of Jesus Christ that people are indeed stopped dead in their tracks by them.

⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Gospel in a Pluralist Society' 1989

3. Strategy:

It was far more part of the Roman tradition than the Celtic to devise coherent, logical, linear strategies: after all those who set off in boats without oars to see where the wind took them could hardly be accused of being obsessed with strategy.

Nonetheless there is nothing inherently unspiritual about appropriate planning and the following commitments are those that have emerged through groups of people (including both Episcopal College and the groups tasked with looking at the five priorities) thinking, talking and praying together, rather than being imposed 'from above'.

This is our plan, but we recognise it as being of a particular time and a particular place, and will develop over time. And the desired outcomes will be not a simple set of activities but a deeper change in **culture**.

Central to all this will be the aim of achieving **sustainability**: a sustainability that is **ministerial** and **financial**, so that it may also be **missional**.

Actions to be taken as follows (noting that Episcopal College needs to do more work on 'who, how and when'):

1. **Becoming a church that celebrates children & young people at its heart:**

Our engagement with the Growing Faith initiative is a key vehicle for achieving this objective. We will also generate ideas and resource projects focussed upon developing ministry with children and young people, and share best practice across the diocese.

2. **Embracing an innovative and pioneering culture:**

We will continue to deliver our SDF projects via 'Transforming Mission' alongside generating and then implementing new ideas for pioneering mission throughout the diocese whilst also celebrating and releasing the gifts of pioneer ministers in our midst.

3. **Becoming increasingly confident in our calling:**

We will attend to the 'shape' of ministry in the Diocese (i) growing oversight and diaconal ministries that 'sandwich' (from above and below) core activities for mission and ministry so as better to enable and support them, and (ii) working intentionally on the variety and quality of those core activities (the 'sandwich filling'). Key tools will be AMD, Setting God's People Free, vocations work, training and formation, and the Clergy well-being agenda: all with the aim of developing confidence and effectiveness in our calling in mission and ministry, individually and collectively.

4. **Rejoicing in strong, warm and mutually encouraging international links:**

We will refresh (and rename) our World Church Committee to develop existing and new links with Mzimvubu, Landévennec, Strängnas and

Lebanon. And we will encourage more churches to nurture links with God's Church beyond Cornwall.

5. Rejoicing in the generosity of God:

Tasks include, inter alia: communicating the theological rationale for giving and receiving; developing a financial strategy for the Diocese addressing income, expenditure and our use of assets; understanding poverty and deprivation in Cornwall; and deciding how we will distribute resources in line with our strategic priorities.

6. Supporting the above:

To support the achievement of these strategic objectives we will also review our governance and the support they require (via Church House and otherwise), looking to achieve economies of scale, by working closely with the Cathedral, Lis Escop and Exeter Diocese, and moving into new accommodation.

+Philip Truro
March 2020