

‘It’s not all about us’

BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH



FROM the touchline, Christine and I could hear only parts of the post-match talk.

Our boys’ football team had lost their match. Amongst the players, the age-honoured process of identifying the guilty and apportioning blame had begun.

The coach gathered his team. From where we stood, some distance away, we caught snippets as he drew out some positive elements (with precious little to work with, the coach’s performance that day provided an object lesson in creative pastoral imagination!). We caught the constructive tone, if not all the words. Finding the good. But then, in a sudden outburst of exasperation - and crisply audible across the field - came the words: “Tom, it’s not all about you!”

Whether the context is the first or 21st century Christian community, playground or politics, workplace or home, learning that it’s not all about me remains, for most of us, a work in progress.

It’s why the vision of Christian community in western nations like ours, so enthralled by individualism, is counter-cultural. For the Holy Spirit calls us, with all our gifts and foibles, into community with Christ and with one another: invites us into the deepest imaginable union with Christ Jesus, the Crucified, Risen and Ascended One, and to a life

of shared joys, sufferings - and to an abundance of joy unimagined by those determined to go it alone.

We are on the threshold of the celebration of 100 years as a diocese. And what a community of communities we are! A community whose life is “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3: 3). A community with a purpose. A community drawn together at the invitation of Jesus to receive His life and then, in and with and through Him, to seek and serve our Father’s Kingdom within the joys and sorrows of this world.

St Benedict described Christian community as ‘a school for love.’ For here, painfully yet liberatingly, we learn that it’s not all about me (however valued and gifted we are) but rather about an invitation to life together in Christ, a life lived in and for the world.

I’ve found a verse from one of Timothy Dudley-Smith’s most well-known hymns useful to learn and use in daily prayer. Perhaps we might pray it as a diocese, as we prepare to mark 100 years and press on into God’s good purposes for us:

*Lord for ourselves; in living power
remake us –
Self on the cross and Christ upon
the throne,
Past put behind us, for the
future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ
alone.*

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UPFRONT

- 3 Faith in Focus
- 4-9 Latest news

IN DEPTH

- 10-15 Lay ministers: the new structure for lay ministry in our diocese
- 16-19 Our global congregations: we welcome people of all nationalities to worship

PEOPLE

- 20-21 My Faith: the Isle of Wight worshipper with a miracle grandchild
- 22-23 Ordinations: meet those about to become clergy
- 24 The Big Issue: why creativity is so important
- 25 Why I love my church: All Saints Church, Denmead

AND FINALLY

- 26 Top 10: Our growing churches

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