**Diocesan Synod, March 2021**

**Farewell to Bishop Christopher**

I have failed to unearth any funny stories or amusing escapades about +Christopher, so he is clearly very circumspect about where he does his dad dancing.

I have one personal recollection, which means I recall the date on which he legally became the next Bishop of Portsmouth. Among the many quaint but interesting rituals associated with making a bishop is one that takes place in St Mary-le-Bow. I went along to that ceremony and it was on the train home that I got an excited phone call from my eldest son informing me that I had become a grandmother. It was 16th April 2010.

In thinking about what I might say today on behalf of the laity here, I reflected on one of the characteristics of the diocese that is often remarked on, and thought about how it is influenced by our bishop. We describe ourselves as very relational. I think that means we are friendly, inclusive, welcoming. And that we enjoy meeting each other – even if it has all been on Zoom for so long now. Then I thought that perhaps it is not all because we are a geographically small diocese, although that is clearly a factor. Maybe it’s because we have a bishop who has outstanding pastoral gifts?

At any gathering, everyone feels welcome and valued. Names are remembered, and family events. Things that might seem as if they don’t really matter, but that make such a huge difference. They bestow confidence that encourages us all to play the part we have been elected to and believe that we will be listened to. Because +Christopher doesn’t do amusing comments at other’s expense, then neither does anyone else. Modelling courtesy creates an atmosphere in meetings like this that makes them feel safe and enjoyable. I never sense that we begrudge the time we commit to Synod. And if anyone does, remember you stood for election to this. +Christopher is pretty much the only person here who doesn’t have that choice!

Coupled to that is another gift that has played a role in creating spaces where people from different church settings can get to meet each other – his gift of hospitality. There is nothing more helpful in promoting harmony than encouraging people to meet informally, for no particular reason but to enjoy conversation and some refreshment. Those are the settings in which those with very different opinions can appreciate what they have in common with others, appreciate one another and generally build bridges that will help sustain unity when times of change and upheaval threaten the cohesion of the diocese.

+Christopher has many gifts, but I have picked on these two because I believe they are particularly valuable in encouraging and empowering laity to grow their own contributions in both depth and impact. They are also ones that perhaps to some extent we might pray to develop ourselves. Living among our communities and in our work places we too can model Christ in the way we treat others; we can invite friends to share meals and get to know them better. And that may prove to be a foundation for growth in numbers too.

So thank you, +Christopher, for your friendship, your kindness, your unfailing courtesy and your ability to make time for the small but important things.

And if our plotting has worked, there should be a gift from us that we hope will contribute to future hospitality as you and Sally start a new phase in your life together – which if my sources are correct, might include sweeping chimneys?!