**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

**DIOCESAN SYNOD, June 2018**

This Synod’s Presidential Address is somewhat different in character from most of the Addresses I’ve delivered as your Bishop over the past seven years.

First I note that the weather forced me to decide to cancel the February Synod, so welcome back after your unexpected break from business. At best, even with improving weather, we would likely have had thin attendance, risking being inquorate, only on-street parking available and varied weather conditions across the diocese which would have made travelling demanding for some. By the year end we shall have included the items we would have considered at that meeting. I am grateful, and I know you will share my gratitude, to our staff colleagues who make the practical arrangements for these meetings. Some are visible at the table and in the kitchen and as I thank them I add our thanks to those in the diocesan office whose attendance we don’t require here on the day.

Secondly, and on a related matter, this is, because of the missed meeting, the first time that Jenny Hollingsworth has been at the side of the Vice-Presidents and myself as acting Diocesan Secretary. I welcome her in this new capacity with our thanks for her work in this interim period and particularly for the commitment of taking on this responsibility almost immediately on return from maternity leave. So we congratulate you, Jenny, on the birth of your twins and welcome you back among us.

Thirdly, and again relatedly, you will be aware of three senior vacancies in the diocese; Diocesan Secretary, Dean of the Cathedral, Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight, in order of the vacancies occurring. To lose three members of the senior team of five colleagues is, you may think, careless at best. Archdeacon Joanne has as well just begun a three month period of extended ministerial development leave (often more briefly called sabbatical leave) so the burden and workload on colleagues is significant and you, as the senior elected members of the diocese on Diocesan Synod, need to be aware of that. I’m not inviting you to make excuses for any delays or shortcomings – indeed we are trying to maintain service as usual with special thanks to those assuming acting responsibilities – but it’s right that you appreciate the situation.

There are, of course, other vacancies in parish and diocesan posts. You will be aware of those in your deanery and archdeaconry, I’m sure, but among those whose role and impact is diocese wide, we have vacancies for the posts of Discipleship, Youth and Children’s Officer, following Ben Mizen’s lengthy and valued ministry, Finance Director (now to be jointly with Winchester but no longer with Guildford to enable better strategic focus), Diocesan Director of Ordinands, and Pioneer Development Officer. The number of parish vacancies is happily low, much lower than for some time, but we are at various different stages of recruitment for this large number of important diocesan posts. These are challenging times and exciting times. It will be some time before all will be filled, but I hope to make the first announcement soon. There is excitement, commitment and energy in this diocese for which I am hugely grateful and I acknowledge our gratitude to the Heads and members of all our four Mission Sections for their skill, hard work and devotion.

New work continues to be initiated alongside the efficient and necessary regular tasks of administration, support and care. I’ll mention, for instance and very incompletely, the final year’s tranche of our planned use of some accumulated surplus for much needed improvements to clergy housing, the launch of our new diocesan magazine now in its second edition, the submission of our outline second application to the Church Commissioners’ Strategic Development Fund, our very active part in the Clewer Initiative to combat human trafficking (and you will have heard and read, I hope, of the Car Wash app), further development and extension of our summer school leavers’ services, and very much more. This is not steady state business-as-usual. It is dynamic, creative, exciting and very Portsmouth; we are nimble, innovative and, as someone said to me this week, ‘a challenger brand’ diocese.

On a practical note, there are not today paper copies of this Address. I’ve observed over the past two or three Synods that they aren’t hugely popular and most aren’t taken away. In the interests of saving paper, time and money I’ve asked for the text of my Address not to be printed. It will continue to be published on our website and available printed in hard copy on request. If you want to request a standing order of a hard copy then we will make a smaller number available on the day but printing one for every member of Synod, present or not on the day, doesn’t seem a good use of God given resources or ours.

A word about discipleship. Our focus today on Setting God’s People Free and on Live:Pray:Serve should remind us not only of our shared ministry as God’s people across this diocese but also of our personal calling. So, continuing to speak slightly unusually in a Presidential Address, I want to charge you as individuals this morning, as for instance I will personally charge those to be ordained deacon and priest the evening before the great public ordination services later this month. Incidentally, please do come. These are glorious, almost spectacular occasions, when all Christian ministry is celebrated through the prism of the specific vocation of deacons and priests. Those people are movingly set apart for that calling with the laying on of hands, presented with the Bible as a sign of the authority entrusted to them to proclaim God’s word, and we are all visibly reminded of the privileges and responsibilities of Christian discipleship. For instance I take off my robes, kneel before each of the deacon candidates, and wash their feet, recalling that we are to be servants after Jesus’ example. Those ordained as priests receive a chalice and paten, because as they lead us in proclaiming the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection the ordinary things of life are transformed. That’s 11am and 4pm on Saturday 30 June.

I ask you, charge you, urge you, discussing today our parts in Christ’s mission, not just to be members of Synod collectively considering how we may make strategy and best organise ourselves to live, to pray, and to serve but also to reconsider your personal calling to be Jesus’ disciples. How will you live more and more like Jesus? Does your pattern of prayer, public and private, properly reflect your trust and reliance on God? How can you be a servant of the people for whom God gave everything? We have pledged ourselves, individually and corporately, to live, pray and serve - all three. It may feel like a trilemma; but it is not a question of trade-off between any of the three elements. You are called, as we are called not to one or two but to all three elements of discipleship. I charge you: Live the good news of the Gospel: Pray for the coming of the Kingdom: Serve our Lord Jesus with all your heart.

*Bishop Christopher*

*June 2018*