

ARMAGH DIOCESAN SYNOD 2019

Archbishop's Address

As your bishop I want to begin by thanking sincerely each of you for all the work you do - in so many different ways - to enhance the life of Armagh diocese and its parishes, and thereby you are extending the work of the Kingdom of God on earth. Many people give selflessly and unassumingly of their time and their gifts to make the worship, the practical needs, and the organisational life of our parishes meld in together effectually. We are talking about what is, at its best, truly collaborative effort - clergy and laity working together as disciples of the same Lord, seeking collectively to make parish communities alive, magnetic and vibrant in serving Jesus Christ and the world he came to save.

I wish also at this point to thank specifically those with whom I work on a very regular basis – the Archdeacons of Armagh and of Ardboe, the Dean of Armagh, the honorary secretaries of Council, and our rural deans. Likewise I express a real gratitude to my executive chaplain, Canon Shane Forster, and to the staff of Church House – Mrs Jane Leighton, Mrs Jennifer Kirkland, and my PA, Mrs Pamela Hutton. And, with these thanks, I include Mr David Brown our youth and children's officer, and Mr Jonathan Hull for all that he does for the communications aspects of the Diocese, and the many others who serve self-effacingly and diligently on the committees and boards of the diocese.

Although the appendix to the Report of the Diocesan Council outlines clerical appointments and changes, I would like to welcome by name a number of recent newcomers to the clerical team here in Armagh. We welcome, as Rectors, Revd Henry Blair to Tullaniskien and Clonoe, Revd Suzanne Cousins to Clonfeacle, Derrygortreavy and Eglis, Revd Pete Smith (formerly curate of St Mark's Armagh) to Loughgall and Grange, and Revd Dr Peter Munce to Mullabrack and Kilcluney. We wish them and their families every happiness in the new settings to which ministry has brought them. And, in addition, it is a great delight to welcome (although they were both already "of this diocese") Revd Christopher West, ordained deacon to serve in Killyman as an intern through this coming year, and Revd David McComb, who was ordained priest in September to serve in a non-stipendiary capacity with the Archdeacon of Armagh in Magherafelt.

We said a farewell to Revd Matthew Milliken who left Milltown Parish in the late summer, we thank him for his ministry here with us, and we wish him and his family happiness and fulfilment in the future.

On a more solemn note, we commend into God's keeping two faithful clergy of the diocese who died in the past few months: Revd Dr John Clyde, former Rector of Desertlyn and Ballyeglish (and previously Bishop's Curate in Acton and Drmbanagher) , and Revd Canon Noel Battye, ordained in this diocese in 1966 but also, in retirement, a very popular member of the diocesan rota for vacancy and sick duty. We remember also before God Mr Ivan Davison who served his parish and this diocese with great loyalty and effectiveness in a number of different capacities over many decades. And likewise we recall with thankfulness Mrs Betty Livingstone, the wife of the late Canon Ken Livingstone. To the families and friends of all those who have died in recent months we offer our sympathy, and our gratitude for the service that their loved ones gave to God and to the Church through their earthly lives.

But one other diocesan matter must of course be noted. There was massive delight throughout the diocese (and indeed throughout the wider Church of Ireland) with the news of the appointment of Archdeacon Andrew Forster to be the next Bishop of Derry and Raphoe. He will of course be hugely missed, not only by the parish of Drumglass and Moygashel, but by the diocese as a whole. He has given wonderfully energetic, cheerful and perceptive service to his parish as Rector, and to the Diocese as an archdeacon and in so many other capacities. We know that his great gifts will make of Andrew a fine bishop, and we wish him, Heather and the family great joy and every blessing in the years ahead.

I want now to talk briefly about two subjects of importance. These are not issues that we can solve instantly, but they are rather matters that we might describe as “slow burn”. They both revolve about a single concept – that of *safeguarding*.

Safeguarding has become so much a mantra in the context of safeguarding children and young people, and also those who are older but who may be at risk or vulnerable in some way, that the danger is that we may become so weary of the expression and by the demands imposed by safeguarding protocols that they fail to see that we are talking about Christian duty and not simply legal obligation. Yes, it is crucially important that we take great care to fulfil necessary legal requirements. Mention will be made later in this synod of the wise decision by the Diocesan Council to appoint a “Safeguarding and Compliance Officer” for the diocese to ensure that parishes and the diocese itself will be compliant with safeguarding regulations and associated issues. We will also be hearing, after the lunch break of other aspects of the good safeguarding of young people. The appointment of a safeguarding and compliance officer is not, we would want you to understand, to “police” parishes, but rather to give a security to those who perhaps feel that they may, inadvertently, be missing some important aspects of safeguarding protocols. I am delighted that the diocese is taking this necessary step.

We need to realise that there is more to safeguarding than ensuring that we stay within the law and follow the correct procedures, absolutely vital although all of this certainly is. It is our duty as Christian disciples to keep those for whom we have responsibility safe from hurt or harm of any kind, but we must not fall into the trap of giving up on ministry with young people, through fear of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. Children and young people also need role models, they need leadership, and they need to know that there is a community – the community of the Church - that truly cares for them, treasures them and wishes them well.

We are living in a world and a surrounding culture of utter confusion, of cynical manipulation and of downright untruth. Even though she was writing half a century ago, the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt might well have been talking about today when she wrote that when we are being lied to constantly, it is not that people believe the lies but that nobody believes anything any longer. In such a world we owe it to young people (and to adults who also may be particularly vulnerable to cynical and evil manipulation) that we do not shrink back from all interaction with those who are easy prey to forces of darkness and wickedness. This is the other side of safeguarding and it is, equally, a Christian duty.

But today we need to be aware of another safeguarding – that of the world in which we live. The young climate change activist Greta Thunberg used a haunting phrase recently in the United States when she said that “*future generations will not forgive us*” for destroying their inheritance - this beautiful world - by our selfishness, indifference and laziness. Yes, we have a duty to future generations, but we have duty to God here and now. The fifth of the Anglican “Marks of Mission” is that the Church must strive to *safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*. In a recent survey of Armagh parishes relating to the Church of Ireland’s Inter-Diocesan Learning Experience project, it became clear that although real efforts are being made in many parishes to promote most of the other Marks of Mission, we were definitely failing in this fifth mark – safeguarding the creation over which God has made us stewards. It is not simple trendiness that should impel us to take seriously our responsibilities to the created order. When we treat this earth as a commodity for our selfish use, we are treating God as a commodity. When we look at the world around us with casual condescension rather than awe and humility, we are treating God with utter contempt. I spoke earlier about young people and our responsibility to them. We should perhaps reverse this axis, and suggest that young people will not regard adult Christians with any seriousness if they see us flagrantly abusing the earth in which we live, while still asserting hypocritically that the earth is a solemn trust lent to us by the God whom we claim to believe is our Creator. Perhaps we can capture the respect and the imagination of a younger generation if we share with them a real concern for the life of this world.

It is not a quick or short-term solution, far from it, but I would ask you to think for a moment about a project, immensely practical and with direct application for both the local and the global contexts. Forty-six per cent of Africa’s land is degraded, which effects the livelihoods of almost 2/3 of the population of Africa. Sixty million people will be forced to leave the degraded areas of Africa within the next two decades. To seek to mitigate the damage being done to the climate of Africa - in many cases, incidentally, by outside business interests - a project began in 2007 to build a “Great Green Wall” – not of concrete but of trees right across Africa from Senegal on the Atlantic to the Red Sea at Djibuti. This would be a belt of trees 8,000 miles in length and nearly ten miles in width across thirteen countries, indeed a Great Green Wall..

Linking with this could capture the spiritual imagination of young people, a venture calling us *in Christ* to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to respect the earth which God has lent to us in trust. Our neighbour here in Armagh, Archbishop Eamon Martin, and I are hoping over the coming weeks to encourage young people across the community to consider engaging with this project - from a faith perspective - through an existing initiative, *Laudato Tree*.

This initiative has been sponsored and developed by the Society of African Missions (which many of you will know from Dromantine near Newry, a venue which hosts a good number of Church of Ireland conferences). If individuals were physically to plant a tree here and also sponsor the planting of trees on the Great Green Wall in Africa, we would be uniting local and global responsibilities – safeguarding this earth in a very practical way. It is no quick fix, but it is a small step in the right direction. Our young people are not greatly interested in pious words, but they do care about practical action in the name of Christ.

But finally..

When I became Archbishop of Armagh at the close of 2012, I made a quiet agreement with my family, a few close friends, *and myself* that I would try to work on as Primate for five years, assuming of course that ill-health or mortality

itself did not intervene. Coming towards the end of that 5 year period, I would then review the situation with my family and, if all seemed to be working out reasonably well and I felt that I was still “up for it”, I would continue on for a further two years, but would not go on beyond that point. This latter moment in time has now arrived and so, earlier this week, I notified the members of the House of Bishops that I would be retiring as Archbishop of Armagh on Sunday 2nd February 2020, exactly three months’ time.

To date, I have enjoyed very good health and a reasonable stock of energy, and for this I am truly thankful to God. It is not something I ever take for granted. However, I recognised from the outset that if I were to embark on a ministry such as this at the age of 63, I must not be foolish enough to imagine that I should continue on, literally “*indefinitely*”. But I must thank you and others throughout the Church of Ireland who have made these past seven years - for me at least - both fulfilling and pleasurable. Of course, not every moment of every day has been without issues or problems to be faced, but this time in Armagh has truly been a very agreeable experience for me, and for this I humbly thank God for the great privilege I was given in being appointed as Primate seven years ago and I also thank all of you, for your constant encouragement, your friendship, your prayers, your support and.. your patience.

I chose 2nd February next as an appropriate date on which to conclude my time as Archbishop. It is the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and this festival marks a *conclusion*, but also a vantage point into the future. It is the proper ending of Christmas (when we include the Epiphany season, which we should, as part of the unfolding of the meaning and mystery of the Incarnation). It is the time when Simeon can say, “Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace”, but of course Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* also looks into the future with energy and faith. *Salvation, revelation, and glory* are the great themes also employed in the *Nunc Dimittis*, as there - on the horizon ahead - stand God’s eternal purposes for all of us, and in every generation. And so it must always be.