

## **MANCHESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD. NOVEMBER 2008**

### **Delegated Presidential address given by the Rt Revd Chris Edmondson, Bishop of Bolton.**

#### **Introduction**

I am grateful to Bishop Nigel for the opportunity of giving this Presidential Address. As the 'nearly new' as I was described the other week, Bishop of Bolton, he has asked me to take the opportunity of reflecting after six months in post, on how I see the Diocese, not least in relation to the fulfilment of the Diocesan Vision – 'Run the Race, Looking to Jesus, Passing on his Faith, Hope and Love'.

When I was invited to interview for the post of Bishop of Bolton, and looked at the papers that were sent in advance of this, I was very struck by, and excited at the possibility of being part of a Diocese with such a clear vision. Inevitably what I share after six months is both partial and personal, but I hope both reflecting on what I sense are positives, and looking at some forthcoming challenges, it might be helpful to all members of synod.

#### **Five reasons why this is a good Vision statement.**

- It fulfils the two criteria of good vision statement – memorable at gun point, and able to be understood by a twelve year old!
- It is Biblical.
- It is Holy Spirit inspired. It was when Bishop Nigel was in Manchester for a Daily Service recording, just prior to the announcement of his appointment as Bishop of Manchester, that he saw the Commonwealth Games baton being taken through the streets of Manchester. An idea was born...!
- It reflects a healthy process of consultation, in that Bishop Nigel met with over 600 churchwardens, and other key players in the Diocese before it went 'public'.
- It has a clear focus, in that there is a clear overall vision, which can inspire the local context, but does not dictate in what form the outworking should happen.

#### **Vision needs to have strategy**

Vision is important, but in order to make it more than a pipe dream, there has to be a strategy, which leads in turn to tangible results.

**There are many definitions of VISION, but one that has helped me over the years which is quite succinct, is 'a picture of the future that produces passion'.**

When it comes to STRATEGY, I understand this to be the means by which this 'picture' might be fulfilled; seeing tangible results over time.

### **How is the strategy currently being fulfilled?**

Bishop Nigel's pilgrimage visits are obviously a key part of the strategy. Just over half way through this process now, as I travel around the parishes and deaneries of the Diocese, I see many people wearing the pilgrimage badges with great pride. Many people have indicated to me that the wearing of those badges has given them opportunities for witness that they might not have otherwise had. The contact with congregations and through the community receptions the wider community has been hugely appreciated and is clearly bearing fruit.

Having the Run the Race logo, and attendant words in all Diocesan publicity is a constant reminder of the vision, along with the new website furthering the communication of this vision.

Within the overall vision, the strategy to help work it out is that we make the commitment to **GROWING CHURCHES, INCREASED GIVING, AND SERVING COMMUNITIES.**

Again given more time I could already tell you from the parishes I have visited, stories of growth and change in all three areas

Changing structures I have learned only changes structures. Changing culture takes time, but has longer lasting effects.

### **Vision leaks!**

While having a clear vision is exciting, there are also many challenges in seeing that vision being fulfilled.

One of the things I have learned from local church leadership in the different parish contexts which I have worked is that vision leaks! It is not simply enough to fill up people's 'vision bucket' once, and think that you have then done the job. I have discovered over the years that once as a leader you are getting sick and tired of speaking about the vision, some people in the congregation are only just beginning to catch on! If that is true in a parish context, how much more challenging is it to see a vision being fulfilled in the dispersed context of parishes that make up a Diocese.

This means that we have to keep painting and re-painting the picture, and go on giving progress reports, that are both encouraging but also reminding people of some of the challenges we face.

### **Four key ways in which we can help see the vision being better fulfilled in the future**

## **1 Do better at sharing stories.**

This is already happening through Crux each month, but I think we can use that resource even more to share stories of growth, give examples of good practice and indicate where resources can be found. I know that during 2009 there are going to be specific emphases on evangelism and finance, with the attendant resources available to parishes in the Diocese.

I believe that through Deaneries we can again 'repaint the picture', for example by ensuring that at least one Deanery Synod per year is an open meeting, at this, parishes could share in word and image examples of growth and encouragement, but also some of the problems they are facing.

Similarly Archdeaconry visitations could be used in creative ways to 'repaint the picture', remind people of the vision, or get some people on board for the first time.

## **2 The Place of Prayer**

Jesus words from St John chapter 15 verse 5 'apart from me you can do nothing', are important reminders to us all, about our dependence on the Lord. Or as one of the Psalms quotes, 'unless the Lord builds a house, they labour in vain who build it'. (Ps 127:1)

One of the things that has concerned me as I have travelled round over the last six months, is the lack of teaching on, and practice of corporate prayer in many of our parishes. Beyond the gatherings for formal liturgical worship, in a lot of parishes this is just not evident.

Furthermore, I think we have a lot to learn about prayer as listening, whether this is a relation to PCCs, Synods, or the Boards, Councils and Committees of our Diocese.

Again from my local Church leadership experience, I have learned the value both within meetings, but particularly beforehand, of giving more than a 'nod to God', but rather seriously taking time to listen for the whispers of the Holy Spirit. This means that action that is generated from discussions, tends to be in line with God's will, rather than simply further activity bolted on to an already busy church life.

To put some flesh on the bones, I wonder about the value of a weekend of prayer across the Diocese say in the autumn of 2009. This could be something we are all committed to together, but which can be planned and tailored appropriately for each context and it's tradition. Such a weekend could be valuable in itself as a focal point, but might perhaps also 'kick-start' opportunities for prayer in a parish.

The first two chapters of the book of Revelation constantly ask the question in relation to the Seven Churches of Asia, 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?' That question I believe applies to this Diocese – 'What is the spirit saying to the Churches and parishes of the Diocese of Manchester?' If we don't make time to listen, we won't find out!

### **3 Clergy Morale and Identity**

We have some wonderful clergy in our Diocese, many of whom are not only working faithfully, but very creatively in some challenging contexts.

However, with less full-time stipendiary priests in the coming years and increasing financial challenges facing the parishes, I know that among some there is a significant level of anxiety about the future.

Connected with this, is the identity issue. One priest said to me recently, 'I don't quite know what I am meant to be – fund raiser pastor, manager, or enabler'. He wasn't saying this in a complaining way but it reflects where I think quite a lot of clergy find themselves at the moment in a changing church and world.

I think we have some very good things in place as far as what the Diocese can offer clergy is concerned. The new Ministry Development Review Scheme for example is I know providing a very helpful tool for regular review and reflection for the clergy of our Diocese – whether they are stipendiary, non-stipendiary, ordained local ministry, or in chaplaincy roles of different kinds. The Continuing Ministerial Education opportunities are valued by those who take them up.

As I go round the Deaneries, I am speaking about 'a threefold cord'. Clergy have a right to expect certain things from the Diocese in terms of their ministerial development. But equally there are things that only clergy themselves can put in place in terms of taking responsibility for time off, having a spiritual director, and how they plan their time generally. I also believe however that the place of the Deanery and its chapter particularly can provide a greater resource than it sometimes does, for not only mutual support, but personal and ministerial development.

There is much more that can be said on this, but I do ask Synod to keep the clergy very much in their prayers, as though the Diocese of Manchester is far much more than its clergy, clergy are key players in terms of their leadership role and responsibilities in setting tone, seeing the vision fulfilled at local as well as Diocesan level.

### **4 Varieties of Gifts.**

I have been excited to see the different expressions of ordained ministries that there are within the Diocese of Manchester, stipendiary, non-stipendiary, ordained local ministers and chaplains in a variety of situations..

However, alongside this, I have come across a lack of confidence in, and sometimes opportunities for lay people to take a full part in the lives and ministry of the local church. In quite a number of situations, people who have clearly have got gifts and potential, are not seeing those realised, or opportunities taken.

When it comes to confidence, I am delighted that we shall be launching a Foundation Course in 2009, which I believe to quote St Paul from Ephesians 4, will help to 'equip the saints for the work of ministry'.

Linked to this is a concern that I have about 'compartmentalisation' of life I sometimes see. In other words what takes place in church on a Sunday, doesn't always seem to connect in ways that I believe it ought to, with the rest of the week where we spend most of our lives. Therefore, again looking ahead maybe even to 2010, I wonder if there is scope for a focus appropriately tailored for each local situation on 'whole life discipleship'. This would enable people to connect in a perhaps more healthy way than is sometimes evident at the moment.

A small step in that direction might be to start what a friend of mine did in his church: on many Sundays he has what he calls a TTT slot – whereby he invites a member of the congregation to the front of the church and briefly asks him or her what difference being in church today will make to how they live out the rest of their lives in the coming week and are there particularly concerns for prayer. This time tomorrow where will you be.

And finally, it has been a huge privilege to become a part of the Diocese of Manchester, not least to be playing a part in helping this exciting vision that is before us, to be fulfilled. There are many signs of encouragement, but obviously many challenges that lie ahead not least because of the uncertain economic climate in which we find ourselves. But friends, it can start with us, as members of synod, making sure that we take our part in not just making the Diocesan vision known as a theory but playing our part in seeing that it actually has tangible results. Thank you

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