

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

14.6.25

One of the most powerful and most moving moments in the wonderful farewell service for Bishop Alan was his laying down of his Crosier, taking off his cope and mitre and then walking through the Cathedral symbolically and literally into retirement. It marked the end of his sixteen years as Bishop for which we continue to give thanks. It also emphasized that we were entering a vacancy. A vacancy in See. We will hear more about this later from the Dean.

I grew up and ministered through years when the mantra was that in a vacant parish – ‘we can’t make any decisions until the new Vicar arrives’. Indeed, sometimes it got mutated into almost ‘we can’t do anything until the new vicar arrives’. Apart from being an unhealthy fruit of clericalism, it is not the truth. Whilst vacancies may not be the time for radical decisions, it is a time for continuing with agreed mission priorities. It is no different from a parish where the journey of mission should not be dependent on the incumbent but is to be owned by all. Mission Action Plans are just that – or should be – prayed over, discerned, priorities and goals that set the agenda. There may be a vacancy in the See but there is not vacancy in our mission, evangelism and outreach. The task of proclaiming Jesus Christ in word and deed goes on.

We are committed to growing younger and more diverse. This is at the heart of our SMIB bid. A church that reflects more fully the diversity of God's people including in relation to ethnicity, disability and social background, and which is getting younger, including, but not exclusively, the inclusion of young people and children, is a priority for us all.

We are committed to flourishing parishes, schools and chaplaincies. That healthy church, rooted in the local, supported and enabled by our gifted and dedicated staff at Holywell Lodge. The church that enables people of all ages to come to faith. To grow in their love of Jesus.

We are committed to looking after one another. To doing all we can to further our mutual well-being. We are only halfway through our Year of Spiritual Wellbeing and Renewal with many opportunities still available from retreats to walking the Bunyan Way. Essential to this is continuing to become a safer church.

We are committed to creative mission – to finding contextually related expressions of mission that reflect all aspects of the five marks of mission; that continues our shared priority of Living God's Love in ways that are filled with generosity and joy imagination and courage. To enable revitalization where we can.

We are committed to be a church that helps people make sense of the world we are in. A world that is increasingly threatening. As I explored recently in a sermon, how do we preach peace in a

world that is not peaceful? After that sermon a mother said to me on the way out – thank you for connecting with what I am feeling; not just my fears about the world but my inner turmoil. It's why I came back to church. I'll bring the children next week. We preach Christ, crucified, risen and ascended because in Him we find hope. If anything let us preach more boldly in relation not just to peace and war, but the misuse of AI and abuse of social media, the needs of the poor and the concerns of the mentally ill.

I and my colleagues on Bishop's Staff look forward to sharing with you in all this and more. The proposed agenda for our next Synod reminds us that there is much to attend to – Education, our SMIB Bid, a Ministry Strategy, finance including taking forward the welcome proposals on stipends and pensions, as well as agreeing our Budget are all anticipated. We have work to do together.

And yes, there will be a new Bishop of St Albans. What better inheritance for her or him than a church going forward in mission.

The journey from Ascension Day to Pentecost apart from being the Season of 'Thy Kingdom Come' begins with a vacancy. Jesus returning to heaven, leaving his newly commissioned disciples to take forward the Good News. It ends with Pentecost – the new church equipped by God to be his witnesses. As we embark upon our vacancy let us rejoice that we are commissioned to go forward, but like those disciples we are not left dependent on our own resources. We too are equipped by that same Spirit.