

Commission at the Archdeaconry Budget Consultations September 2014

The gospels repeatedly remind us that what is, is only a foretaste, at best an earnest, a preparation for what will be. We pray every day – many of us more than once a day – ‘Thy kingdom come.’ Our Christian faith, like our prayer, looks forward confidently with our eyes raised to the future.

This evening, and next year’s proposed stand-still budget, is offered to enable us to take the space to reinvigorate our vision and renew our confidence. If you welcome next year’s budget only because it proposes no overall increase, then we drift into a serious error. The most important issue before us is what we discern God is calling us to be and do as a church and diocese.

What is God calling us to be and do? We can ask that question and answer it in many different ways, as we have heard this evening as we seek to engage and reach out. Another way to put the question is to ask how we will celebrate the centenary of the diocese in 2027. Will we celebrate the survival of the diocese? Will we be relieved to be at least a rump of what we were in 1927, or 1977 or today? Are we looking just to hang on as a declining church with some lingering presence in our communities?

Or, we can embrace a vision of mission and ministry, Ministry for Mission, where we do not think stand-still and survival are part of our Christian vocation.

By my rough calculation the one hundred and seventy Christian communities in our diocese are far more than the combined total of all the Marks and Spencers, Sainsburys, Tescos, Waitrose, Morrisons, Lidl and Aldi in the diocese. And we add to this the thousands of weekly worshippers and the two hundred plus ministers. What potential we have! What more we might do!

We are inspired, literally inspired by the Holy Spirit to be the Church, the people of God in our community. We sometimes glibly talk in the Church of England about being present in every community. But presence can be passive. We want to be active and positive – and we’ve heard good examples of that tonight – in witness, service and proclamation. The call is to look forward, be positive, generous, and to give ourselves to God trusting that God will use us.

Ministry for Mission is more than just being there; more dynamic than presence alone. Jesus was present in Galilee and Jerusalem; he was with disciples, friends and the crowds. But present with a purpose. We can find ways to stick around and to still be present in five or ten years and in 2027. Let’s find with Jesus and each other God’s way to be at the heart of our communities, because we have the heart of Jesus.

Bishop Christopher