

May 2016, Creating Connections in the Diocese of Bristol, from Father Charles:

As it says in the introduction to the **Vision and Priorities for the Diocese of Bristol**, 'Creating Connections is our response to Jesus' invitation....to see the Kingdom of God become a reality'. We discussed at the Parish Conference how we have a part to play in this, not only as the Worldwide Church, and the Diocese of Bristol, but more specifically as the community of worshipping Christians centred here at All Saints. We also talked about how the full responsibility for this does not fall on to our shoulders, because Jesus' invitation is for us to participate as partners in the missio Dei.

What does this mean?

In the language of the Diocese this is about making connections: Connections with God; with each other; and with our communities.

The idea of 'connections' is very powerful. For me this is because one of the dominant topics of New Testament study is the 'Kingdom of God', and embedded within this are the ideas relating to how we respond to God, and participate in His work, as a church and also as individuals. Much of this is about making connections.

Connecting with God

If our vision is to become more like Christ, through our worship, prayer and study, then this has a direct impact on our words and actions; and in particular how we interact with His creation, the world around us. In a way, this relationship that God has with 'His people' and our individual relationships becomes the very heart of our faith.

Connecting with Each Other

In the church we are not great at reflecting the idea of unity. There seem to be so many issues and 'ways' that separate us. Yet Paul implores us to 'make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'.

There are some real challenges here partly because we, as people, like to categorise, separate and define, creating boundaries between things, ideas and geographies. This process of categorization helps us to make sense of our world. Yet above this we are asked to seek unity, to look for the connections that bring greater understanding, reinforce our strengths and enable our actions. And also connections that deepen and broaden our faith, providing opportunities for support and inspiration for each one of us and for us collectively.

Connecting with Our Communities

We are part of the whole of creation and embedded in this, our local community. Our challenge is to look wide and to see near. Many of the ideas that emerged within the Parish Conference related to making connections, and making a difference, with the

different parts of our local population; and also working to have voice and impact on those who are further afield.

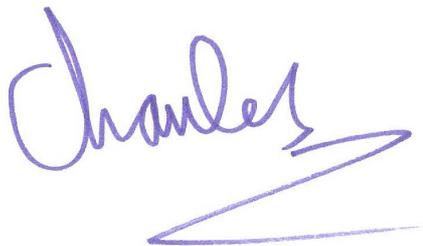
Because the range of activity in which we could engage is so wide, our challenges are to discern where to focus energy and attention and how to make things happen.

The PCC Awayday (Saturday 21 May, between 1000 and 1500)

Part of the work the PCC will be doing in May will be to ask ourselves some of these questions and address these challenges. Based upon the work of the Parish Conference, the PCC will take the developing ideas and focus on some topics, that when made to live, will create connections that provide evidence of the Kingdom. It is also important for us to ensure that we select the 'right' actions so that we can make a difference, bring the Kingdom closer and act within our capabilities, resources and in line with our strengths and tradition.

This will be an exciting month of May!

With every blessing,



PRAYER GROUP

There will be a meeting on Monday 9 May at 7.30pm in the Sacristy, for anyone who is interested in starting monthly Prayer Group at All Saints.

CHURCH CRAWL TO THE GOLDEN VALLEY

HEREFORDSHIRE

Saturday 14th May 2016

Leaving All Saints 9.15am and arriving back approximately 6pm.



Visiting Abbey Dore, St Margarets, Kilpeck and one or two others!

Please bring picnic lunch. Cost around £12 for minibus, plus £7.50 per head for afternoon tea.* Also £4 each for conducted tour of Dore Abbey and £1.50 for coffee and biscuits at Dore Abbey.

Please could you let me know whether you want tea, and coffee and biscuits by Sunday 7 May, so that I can book it all.

* Tea, scones, clotted Cream, Jam, Bara Brith, Welsh cakes. Please sign notice in porch.

Liz Badman

Sidespersons

Amongst the actions that took place at the Annual Parish Church Meeting was the 'Appointment of Sidespersons'. This is a really important role and we are most grateful to the team who do so much more than provide a welcome at the door whilst they give out the pewslips.

Canon E2 of the Church of England, having confirmed that sidespersons must be appointed and be on the electoral role, states:

It shall be the duty of the sidespersons to promote the cause of true religion in the parish and to assist the churchwardens in the discharge of their duties in maintaining order and decency in the church and churchyard., especially during the time of divine service.

So there we have it! Our sidespersons are to 'promote the cause of true religion' and also 'maintain order and decency'. Many parishes have descriptions of the precise duties required and times at which those on the rota must be available, but in truth the demands of the role are usually pretty clear. There are, of course, a few duties and functions that sidespersons are required to fulfil that might not be that obvious.

Many thanks to our Sidespersons Team for carrying out this important role on our behalf.



Cartoon reproduced from CartoonChurch.com and drawn by Dave Walker for the Church Times

DEVOTION TO OUR LADY

The Bristol Diocesan Walsingham Festival will be celebrated this year with a Solemn Mass at **All Saints, Clifton**, on **Tuesday 17th May** at **7.30pm**. The Celebrant will be Fr Charles Sutton, and Fr John Pedlar will preach

Although this is a Walsingham event, arranged by the Bristol Church Union, all are welcome

The Bristol Catholic Societies Assumptiontide Festival takes place on **Saturday 20th August**. The Rt Revd Michael Langrish, formerly Bishop of Exeter, will preside and preach at the Solemn Concelebrated Mass in **Bristol Cathedral** at **12 noon**. Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Benediction will follow at **3.00pm** in the **Lord Mayor's Chapel**.

Full details will appear in the June Magazine. Again, all are welcome, to celebrate the Glorious Assumption of Our Lady in a proper Catholic manner.

Chris Verity

INDENTITY IN CHRIST: Sermon preached on Easter 4 by Jessica Smith

"I know that I find who I am through Jesus Christ, not through genetics, and my identity in him never changes." That was the confident assertion of Justin our Archbishop following the revelation of the identity of his biological father. The reaction to it has been broadly positive, with some viewing it as a journalistic opportunity for sensationalism. There was particular praise for the honest and dignified way in which both he and his mother Jane responded to a huge personal shock. Indeed, not only was it characterised by dignity and honesty, but also with eloquence in expression of Faith. If one were being slightly cynical one might conclude that, with his background in the business world, the Archbishop was savvy enough to seize the opportunity to turn the disclosure into a 'sales opportunity.'

More important to the Faithful, though, he used it as a God-given opportunity for mission and evangelism. As one newspaper editor commented, *'this story is better than a thousand sermons'*. Point taken! Let's this morning, though, look at it through the lens of Vocation, that being the special intention for Mass today.

For Christians, vocation begins at baptism, whatever stage in life that happens. It is reaffirmed at Confirmation, as baptism promises are repeated, and the Bishop speaks those lovely words *"God has called you by name and made you his own"* before laying on hands and saying *"Confirm, O Lord, your servant with your Holy Spirit."* Calling is the primary impulse of God's communication with us as individuals. He knows each of us long before we know ourselves and has done from our creation in his image onwards. The patriarchs and prophets were all called by name and shown their particular roles in the story of redemption.

“Before you came to birth I consecrated you; I appointed you as prophet to the nations.” God says to Jeremiah (1:5). Jeremiah demurs that he’s too young; other great people in Scripture also gave excuses before eventually realising that when God calls, he provides what’s needed. Responding to the divine impetus is more a matter of discernment than simply being recruited by God, which goes some way to explaining initial reluctance. Both faith and courage can be slow-growing. But the main point here is one which may be obvious but also easily forgotten. Every single baptised Christian is called by God to live a kingdom life and none of us can deny we have a vocation. To narrow the concept to ordained ministry or the religious life, vitally important as these are, means missing the point of who we are and whom we serve.

Our calling as disciples commits each of us, regardless of individual strengths and weaknesses, to the basics of prayer, worship, reading and meditating on the Scriptures. Without those three we can’t grow in the God-given baptismal gifts of faith, grace and light. Some we do with others, some alone. Some discernment is done together, some as individuals. A major reason for the Parish Conference last month was to aid All Saints’ corporate discernment in the way forward. What is our vocation in this Diocese, in the Church of England, in the Anglican Communion, as a microcosm of the Universal Church? How will each of us play our part in living this out as well as our personal calling as those whom God has made his own? Our Lord makes it clear that who we are by baptism is what counts: *‘My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who hear the word of God and do it’* “Who are you?” asked the little girl at the door of Canterbury Cathedral in March 2013, *“and why do you request entry?”* “I am Justin” came the reply, *“and I come as one seeking the grace of God to travel with you in his service together”*.

Returning to those all-too-human excuses used throughout all generations, the reasons given not to live up to our vocation, to ignore the call of discipleship in baptism, the list is endless: too old; too busy; too stressed; burdening issues from the past; health problems; family commitments ... all of them used by the good, the not-so-good, the great and the not-so-great throughout the history of salvation. The recent paternity disclosure and back story bears eloquent witness in showing that’s just what they are – excuses. Because whatever our circumstances, God gives us grace to serve him, most often in ways beyond our reckoning or imagination. A child conceived in less than edifying circumstances; an upbringing he describes as ‘messy’, ‘the loneliness of being in a crowded boarding school’; ‘an impossible childhood’, as his mother described it. Such was the early life of the man who was to become the Primate of All England, head of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Maybe it’s a sign of the ever-growing kingdom that, whereas well within living memory, his status as a bishop would have been in question, the stigma of illegitimacy would now be unthinkable.

What’s abundantly clear is that both mother and son, at the appointed time, heard God’s life-changing call. They responded and it changed each of their lives immeasurably. Christ the good shepherd, who knows each of his sheep inside and out, held them in the safety of the

sheepfold through trials and tribulations, and also showed them the riches and adventure of his pasture. God's call, when heard, will never be to become anything or anyone we *can't* be, but always to become more truly *ourselves*. Sometimes we need to withdraw from the world to process it. The aptly-named 'karaoke' society, where we find ourselves trying to sing, often badly, to an accompaniment quite unsuited to our own special God-given voice, mitigates against hearing it. There's a lot of noise in our industrialised world, and the 'still small voice' that Elijah eventually perceived can be drowned out. Discerning our individual vocation may mean significant life style changes.

What about the help we should give each other? Personal vocation needs to be tested and affirmed within community and for most of us that will involve the congregation where we worship. As Bishop Rowan observed, "*all of us have to ask one another at times, 'tell me who you think I am'; and all of us are obliged to answer that with as much candour and as much charity as we can*". It goes without saying that those of us with licensed ministries, Lay or ordained, are gladly available to anyone seeking to explore that kind of vocation. But that willingness applies to everyone and it might mean looking at one another in a different way, in obedience to Our Lord's command to '*strive first for the kingdom of God*'. In most congregations there's a tendency to look first at jobs that need doing, what roles need fulfilling, specially the least attractive ones, then try to recruit. Part of striving for the kingdom involves looking at one another as God's chosen ones and helping each other to be the best disciples we can be; to become, in the words of St Irenaeus, human beings fully alive. If we are such a community, then the rest, Jesus assures us, will be given us as well. We might reflect especially on those at an early stage of their Christian journey, who've maybe had to pluck up courage to pass through the church door to find out what happens when we're at worship. What do they seek? "Is this for me? Is this where I feel at home? Could I be myself here and grow? Will being here help me through this difficult time?" That could well happen by joining the choir or the serving team, flower-arranging or serving coffee, but first and foremost the message we give must be "God loves you and you'll be loved here". No true vocation can be perceived without that simple truth in people's hearts.

A shaky start in life can never alter that vital truth, and we must find ways of showing it, particularly to the vulnerable and needy. That's part of our vocation; mostly we're sheep, but at times we must shepherd each other. The bishop who banged on the door of Canterbury Cathedral with his staff three years ago has a more manifest calling as shepherd of Christ's flock. He also has a reputation for fearlessness and honesty, of being in possession of a special grace which enabled him to hold up his head in the wake of a private family matter made public, in which he had been prepared to co-operate. This will encourage others, possibly struggling with vocation, to realise, in Justin Welby's words, "*... this is a story of redemption and hope from a place of tumultuous difficulty and near despair in several lives. It is a testimony to the grace and power of Christ to liberate and redeem us ... which is offered to every human being.*"

IN THIS MONTH ... MAY 1985

[Father Peter Cobb's letter to Magazine readers, when the 'young theologian' to whom he refers, a mere stripling of 35, was a lecturer and Dean of Clare College, Cambridge. David Jenkins was Bishop of Durham from 1984 to 1994. His controversial remarks on Christian doctrine were made on the TV programme Credo in 1984, when he was Professor of Theology at Leeds, but already named as the next Bishop of Durham.]

'The war of Jenkins's mouth,' as one of the Sunday newspapers gleefully described it, goes on. The Bishop congratulates himself that because of his remarks people have talked more about the Resurrection this Easter than ever before. If this were the whole truth it would be all to the good. Certainly some have been provoked to think more deeply about what they mean by belief in the Resurrection, but most of the talk has been about differences between the bishops of the Church of England and about the propriety of a bishop (as opposed to an academic) airing his doubts in public.

The Bishop has in fact repeatedly affirmed his faith in the Resurrection as well as in the Incarnation. Unfortunately it is the negative side of his statements - for example his saying that he is "wholly uncertain about the Empty Tomb as literal historical fact," - that has come across. This is partly due to the way the press has tried to sensationalise his remarks but it is also due to his own phraseology. The popular view of the Resurrection as the resuscitation of a corpse is very inadequate, but to describe it as belief in a "conjuring trick with bones" was pastorally insensitive and needlessly offensive.

The Bishop is making an important point. The heart of the Resurrection faith that God has raised up Jesus and he is alive for evermore "depends on the encounter of faith, the assurance of faith and the practice of faith." I think he is unnecessarily sceptical about the evidence of the tomb's being empty, but the empty tomb alone does not and could not prove what we mean by the Resurrection. The empty tomb, moreover, is not irrelevant as the Bishop seems to imply. In the words of a young theologian, Rowan Williams, *'Matthew at least is perfectly well aware that the tomb story is not a sufficient condition for resurrection faith, but that is not to say that the evangelists are mistaken in seeing it as a necessary condition.'*

The raising up and glorification of Jesus's physical body is part and parcel of our belief in the goodness of the material world and of our understanding of the nature of man. We are not spirits temporarily inhabiting bodies. We are as much bodies as spirits. The John Brown idea of the Resurrection - 'John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on' - is totally inadequate. The tomb must have been empty if our beliefs about creation and the nature of man are true.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

‘Let’s Talk about Europe (for an hour)’

Monday 20th June 7 -8 PM in the Randall Room

The upcoming referendum on whether the UK remains part of the European Union is generating much heated discussion, some say with relatively little light.

To help give an even-handed view of some of the big problems, we will be holding an event to share facts and allow people to ask questions.

Dr Phillip Syrpis, Reader in EU Law, University of Bristol Law School, will offer a 20-minute talk to lay out the big questions. He will look particularly at issues of sovereignty, the limits of EU competence and ways it should be shaped, and implications for UK society.

Those attending are invited to send their questions ahead of time to Steve D’Evelyn: husmde@bristol.ac.uk

We will be holding a mock vote before and after the talk and question-and-answer session: let’s see how our opinion changes over the course of the evening!

No tickets required. Come and join the discussion about the referendum!

From the Bishop

I read in the paper recently that 2015 was a bumper year for deaths and that life expectancy fell last year for the first time in twenty years.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) stated this as it sought to explain a 5.6% increase in deaths in England and Wales. The report suggested that there were two primary factors; one was flu with the suggestion that the vaccine administered for that particular flu season was inadequate, and the other factor was death through dementia.

I have no feel for what impact such a story will have on those who read it, though to be flippant undertakers and pension fund managers will not be complaining! We used to say that death was a taboo subject in the so-called developed world. I’m not sure I would call it a taboo, I just think that we don’t have a narrative within ‘modern Britain’ from which we can frame our understanding of death. Consequently, our response seems to be that of bewilderment, anger and confusion for the bereaved, and avoidance tactics for the rest of the population.

People will often say to me things like, "I'm not frightened of dying, I just worry about the way I will die." Nobody I know likes the idea of dying alone, drugged to the eyeballs in a hospital bed somewhere/anywhere. Though we can't quite imagine what dying well might look like, I think, when it comes, we all aspire to die well.

Though I was and remain adamantly against the Assisted Dying Bill that MP's thankfully and forcefully kicked into the long grass last year, I do have questions as to why we keep people whose quality of life is seriously degraded in a way that seems, at times unnecessary. Whether it's fear of litigation on the part of medics or pressure from relatives I have no idea.

The Bible says we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:14), but we were not made to live forever. We age, our bodies age and huge sums of money are invested in cosmetic surgery or working out if we can isolate the gene which ages us so that we might look good all our lives! As a pensioner, I am now told that the secret to longevity is to ensure I walk 10,000 steps every day until I can stagger no more.

Here's my main point: Without a narrative within which we can interpret death, it will always seem scary, bewildering and confusing. It's time to think again.

As I write we are in the season of Easter. For me one of the most moving moments of the Christian year is at the end of the Eucharist in the Cathedral when the choir process out singing the Easter Anthems. It gets me every time! Here is a sample:

"Christ has been raised from the dead: the first fruits of those who sleep. For as by man came death: by man has come also the resurrection of the dead"

The Christian faith has a clear narrative around death. For those who are "in Christ," death is not an end but a new beginning. Life eternal is a gift from God through faith in Christ and not something we earn. Knowing the consequences of death sets us free to live the new life that God wants for us now.

The Church, you and me are meant to be part of evidence of the risen life that Jesus through his Resurrection brings. I sometimes think we need to wake up to this truth. Is it true to say that what I think about death can profoundly impact the way I think about life and how I live it?

HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! Now that's what I call a narrative!

+Mike April 2016

CORPUS CHRISTI

The month of May is, of course, well known as the month of special veneration of Our Lady, but this year, due to the early date of Easter, it also includes the great Feast of Corpus Christi, which takes place on Thursday 26th May.

The historical, and, more importantly, the theological, aspects of this Feast were dealt with in this Magazine prior to last year's Feast, but it is relevant to note that Corpus Christi, in practical terms, marks the end of the great period of Feasts and Festivals which commenced with the Holy Triduum, and the Triduum commenced with the celebration of the actual institution of Holy Communion by Our Lord. Therefore, this greatest time of the Christian year, the time which encapsulates the whole basis of our faith, begins and ends with the celebration of, and thanksgiving for, the actual fact of Holy Communion - in other words, the Mass.

A great deal of thought and effort by clergy, choir and servers, goes into the planning and execution of the Feast of Corpus Christi. All Saints maintains the traditional day (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday) for this celebration; it is to be hoped that the people of All Saints will be with their clergy, choir and servers at 7.30pm on Thursday, 26th May 2016.

Chris Verity