

From Bishop Christopher to the Whole Diocese

As we approach the midpoint of our Diocesan Centenary year, I want to share with you my reflections about what God has been doing among us in recent months, and the shared future to which God is calling us.

During his visit to the diocese in May, Archbishop Justin said:

“One of the inspiring things this week has been seeing the way that the Diocese of Coventry is drawing together all aspects of God’s ministry. This great strength that comes from unity is so exciting.”

I too am excited about this, and my prayer is that you will be excited too.

Some of what I am about to say has been captured in a two-minute video that can be downloaded at <https://vimeo.com/270059416>

If you’ve not already done so, I’d be very grateful if you could watch this video and share it with others.

Whole Diocese

During our preparations for the Diocesan Centenary we started to rediscover what it means to be a diocese; or, to be more precise, what it means to be a *whole diocese*.

By speaking about *whole diocese*, we recognise that this includes not only our parish and other church communities, but also our schools, chaplaincies and cathedral, who *together* gather around the bishop to share in the apostolic ministry and mission given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.



We all have our part to play in the work of God in this place.

Starting with ‘why?’

When I first came to the diocese I was very impressed by the way in which our parishes were united by what has been called our three-fold purpose statement:

“To worship God, make new disciples and transform communities.”

My commitment to these foundational activities remains unchanged.

At the same time, I’ve been challenged to ask the question, “Why do we do these things?” and to distinguish the *why* question from the *what* (we do) and *how* (we do it) questions.

There’s no doubt that our three-fold statement is a great summary of *what* we do, but it doesn’t explain *why* we do them.

Our **mission** is “to worship God, make new disciples and to transform communities”. But is this really the best way to describe the shared **purpose** of the whole diocese?

Why do we do what we do?

Because of our great cathedral, the diocese is known throughout the world for the ministry of reconciliation.

Although this ministry began and continues in Coventry Cathedral, in recent years we have seen a growing desire for ‘reconciliation’ to be at the heart of the Whole Diocese of Coventry.

St Paul described the gospel in in this way:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

Perhaps this verse gives us the best answer to the question, “Why does the whole diocese of Coventry exist?”

All this is from God

It all begins with God. It's all grace.

This is why we worship God.

...who reconciled us to himself through Christ

This is the good news, the Gospel, for the world.

This is why we make new disciples.

...and gave us the ministry of reconciliation

The good news – our reconciliation with God in Christ and the healing that it brings to our fractured relationships with each other and the earth – is to be made known and made visible by the power of the Spirit.

This is why churches transform communities.

This is why schools help children to live life in all its fullness.

This is why chaplaincies help organisations to hear the gospel and to reflect God's kingdom.

This is why our cathedral promotes peace and reconciliation in the diocese and throughout the world.

It also illustrates why we all need each other. The ministry of reconciliation is so immense, so all-encompassing, that the cathedral can't do it alone. Furthermore, churches can't do it alone, schools can't do it alone and chaplains can't do it alone. We can only fulfil our God-given ministry by working together.

Our **mission** has not changed. We continue "to worship God, make new disciples and transform communities". But perhaps a better expression of our **purpose** is to be:

"Partners together in the Gospel and ministry of reconciliation."

By grace, God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and calls us to invite others to enter into the reality of this reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20) and to live out its full implications in relationships between people, communities and nations. As the Dean puts it, we are 'journeying together from a fractured past towards a shared future'.

A shared purpose for a shared future

I've tried to summarise some of the recent discussions in Bishop's Staff and Council and I offer these for your prayerful consideration so that we can develop these ideas together.

As I mentioned at the outset, the midpoint of our centenary year feels like an appropriate time to be doing this. In the remainder of the year I hope there will be much discussion, not only about the 'why?', but also about the 'how?' we journey together.

I'd very much welcome any responses from individuals or groups. There are also two resources that I want to bring to your attention.

First, I commend to you a short paper written by our Director of Communications entitled **Godly Communication**. I am grateful to those of you who commented on an earlier draft, and Graeme Pringle has now updated this paper in the light of these comments and other discussions.

As he says in his introduction to the paper:

"Communication is integral to God's being, God's mission and God's strategy, and these realities are to shape the culture of our whole diocese. Without it, leaders can't empower, structures are ineffective and it's difficult to form loving relationships."

Good communication will be vital for our journey together as a whole diocese. I therefore commend this paper for discussion in churches, schools, chaplaincies, cathedral, synods, boards, committees and diocesan offices.

Second, I commend to you a day's **Centenary Conference** called 'Into a Shared Future', to be held in Coventry Cathedral on **Saturday 3 November 2018**.

I hope that hundreds of people from our churches, schools, chaplaincies and the cathedral will gather to consider the next steps of our journey together. Please put the date in your diary, and look out for further details which will be announced shortly.

With my great appreciation of your place in the Whole Diocese of Coventry.

As ever, yours in Christ

+ Christopher

