

## **Address to Synod by Bishop Stephen– May 9<sup>th</sup> 2009**

All except monks and nuns are called to live in the 'real world', with the same personal opportunities and temptations, same communal stresses and joys. We have privileges as we can retreat regularly into God's house. The reason we come together in God's church for worship, teaching and mutual support, is in order that we can return with fresh hope, vision and strength into the world.

How we react to the pressures of 'this world' and how we respond to each other must be a lived-out sign to everybody of how God wants us to be together.

Our task is to build communities and the Kingdom of God. We are called to work together, to bear one another's burdens and care for the vulnerable and poor. This was shown particularly and perfectly in Jesus Christ. A life full of joys but also a story of sacrifice and self giving

What emerged in the Diocese as Growing Forward together towards 2020 – and still remains is an attempt to read the signs of our times and the changing patterns as they affect the institution of the Church.

This includes the changing pattern of those called to ordained and lay ministries, changing patterns of churchgoing, changing patterns of living as individuals and in multiple communities, and the changing and growing financial pressures we face.

Churches are exploring new ways ("fresh expressions") of being together and reaching out to others. The challenge is not to see this simply as an opportunity for those who like that sort of thing, but for all of us to breathe new life into our Christian lives and worship however traditional our inherited model might be

We should not be reactive to outside pressures, but rather to take the initiative and to plan and adapt in order to become the church we believe God wants us to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I believe as your Bishop, that today the signs are there telling us that God is pleased with us and with the direction we are going. Well done faithful servants. But the years are slipping away and we need to recover a sense of urgency. Time is not on our side. "Today" is a word that occurs over and over again in Christ's challenges to his people and in the words of the prophets to the people of Israel before him. 'Domani' or 'mañana' do not occur at all!

Today the Church in this diocese is subject to exactly the same pressures as everyone else in this time of economic distress – pressures on personal finances, the cost of pensions, reduced investment income from savings, uncertainty about the future, and so on. Ray Harris will spell out what this means for our budget next year.

As Bishop, I want simply to underline for all of us that how we deal with these challenges will reveal how deep is our commitment to God's call to live out a gospel (good news) of love. What do I mean?

We simply cannot expect other people to change, so that we can carry on as we are. So we must not point the finger at others without also pointing to

ourselves. This means that our starting point must be to ensure that every part of our diocesan family accepts the need to make sacrifices ... to discover new, fresh ways of doing things.

We must guarantee that we provide for those individuals, parishes and congregations that cannot care for themselves.

I am frankly ashamed that there are parishes in this diocese who CHOOSE not to pay their Share. They then try to justify it, leaving others to pay the price. It is not acceptable to call ourselves Christians and decide not to pay our share of the costs – especially the financial costs. It is not acceptable. It should not be accepted. Saint Paul would have written to such churches and named them!

We must seek to ensure, as we look at the budget for next year, that we end up fitter and stronger for our work of worship and witness. We must maintain a clear vision of the strategic direction where we are being guided by the Holy Spirit.

All that we do and decide must not be like every other organisation but must be clearly and humbly under God's authority as part of our Christian, loving response to each other.

With those challenges and guidelines, and our call to mission, I am now happy to ask Ray to take us into a bit more detail.