

## **Address to the Edinburgh Diocesan Synod**

14<sup>th</sup> March 2020

1. The situation around Coronavirus is rapidly changing and this address is already different from the one I wrote on Thursday. Thank you for the care everyone is taking over arrangements for communion – we know the advice is likely to develop and we must remain alert to this.

All this presents us with a challenge. Our faith calls us to trust God and not to be fearful, but whilst we are assured that we live in the presence God in this life and trust that it will be so in the next I don't read anywhere a promise that baptism makes us invulnerable to viruses. Faithfulness, not foolhardiness is required; care for ourselves and care for others. And faithfulness requires us to be constant in our pastoral contact with those shut in by the virus or victims of it, and it requires us to be inventive too. The telephone promises to be our friend in all this. A way of ensuring that no one feels forgotten, especially folk living alone far from families. I apologise for stating the obvious, but every congregation needs have a simple but deliverable plan of action and each of us must remember that love for neighbour may mean we go shopping for them. This will be a test of the quality of our community life and of our care for the wider community.

2. The principles that guide us around the Coronavirus are the same as those that undergird our Safeguarding policies more generally – to do all we can to keep others safe. Let me now turn more formally to Safeguarding.

We had an excellent turn-out at our training in January and the atmosphere then encourages me to believe that we no longer think of safeguarding as a tiresome chore but as an essential and even joyful part of being disciples of Jesus Christ. We can never be complacent. All those in regulated work must attend regular trainings and ensure that others too know what the safeguarding policy is in their church. I would expect –

- a. That all clergy and lay readers, all in ministerial leadership as well as safeguarding coordinators in each charge should attend trainings every two to three years. However, you should know that the SEC is adopting a new policy in June and therefore all of us must attend a training session on this before the end of this calendar year. You should also know that next year we expect the Government to introduce new rules, so it's

essential that you attend a training next year too. We shall be keeping an attendance register and I emphasise that attendance at a training event means attendance at the whole day.

b. That Vestries (or equivalent) take responsibility for providing safeguarding training for Sunday School leaders, Pastoral Visitors and all others with PVG clearance, and offer appropriate supervision and pastoral care. You may want to link with other charges on this and there's much advice available from the Provincial Office, via Donald Urquhart and Daphne Audsley. I hope that in due course there will be on-line training facilities but these aren't yet available.

c. That every Vestry should have a 'risk register' covering many areas of congregational life – we should make ourselves aware that safeguarding, or the lack of it, should be registered as a serious risk which we can address in a number of ways.

d. That we practice 'safe recruitment'. Last year's audit of safeguarding across the Province revealed that Edinburgh was bottom of the league table on this. Safe recruitment doesn't just apply to paid positions; most of our workers are volunteers. I would expect each charge to have a clear policy on volunteer recruitment: any role should offer a job description (however simple) as well as training and support. And if the work is with people we should consider seeking references. This should certainly be so for any role that requires PVG clearance – and the volunteer should not begin the role until clearance is obtained.

In all this please remember that the Charity Regulator, OSCR, is taking an increasing interest in the conduct of smaller charities. No charge can merely claim to be a safe place, each of us must show that we have done all we can to ensure that it is so.

Simon Filsell will tell us more presently about the training opportunities coming up this year.

3. To conclude the theme of safeguarding let me comment briefly on the safeguarding of our planet. I said plenty about this at our synod in October and the story of the Prodigal Son (and his disgruntled brother) in our gospel reading this morning gives us a picture both of how we waste our inheritance entrusted to us by our heavenly Father, and of what is needful in terms of

repentance and amendment of life if we're to return to a true appreciation of our home.

COP 26 isn't an imported police drama it's the United Nations climate summit taking place in Glasgow from 9<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> November this year. This puts Scotland right at the heart of the debate. A Provincial group has been set up to work on this, so watch out for ideas and resources that will help us to get involved. There will be visitors from all over the UK and the world who we might welcome, all sorts of fringe events we can take part in. And churches and other faith groups will be seeking to make their presence felt. As I go around it's encouraging to discover eco-congregation groups in more and more churches, challenging us all to live with the well-being of the planet in mind and to take care of those most vulnerable to the climate crisis.

Please encourage your congregations to get involved and why not, if you don't already do this, make September your Creationtide?

4. Finally, a comment about today's agenda.

A number of times in recent months I've invited myself to congregations simply to enjoy being there only to discover that people look warily at me because they think I've come to close them down. Two congregations have closed during my time as bishop (and one has opened) but I can assure you that I did not tell them to close, it was the other way around. I suppose that the threat my presence appears to pose emerges from the insecurity felt by some of our smaller congregations and, indeed, the struggle all of us face to make ends meet and to find people to do the jobs that every Vestry requires. I and the Dean and Diocesan Secretary are always happy to come to visit to hear your concerns but our first option is never to suggest closure.

At our last Synod in October, David Dixon intimated his intention to bring to this synod the resolution that St Barnabas' Church, Moredun should be kept open for at least the next 10 years. Apologies that David's intervention was omitted from the minutes – this will be set right before we ask you to approve them. I thank David for his proposal and although the Standing Committee was unwilling to include the motion on the agenda we do accept the spirit in which it was proposed, namely, that we need to look forward and plan for a future in which all our charges, whatever their size, whatever their context, may flourish. Indeed, that's precisely why today's agenda is as it is,

why the Mission and Ministry Committee is making its proposals and why, this afternoon, we shall be taking a serious look at future finances.

A Diocese is not a loose collection of independent charges it is a family that supports all its members. Recent years have given us some excellent examples of how this support can encourage new life and growth and our conversations today are intended to ensure that this will continue, not just for 10 years but well beyond that.

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