

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS &
EPISCOPAL VISITATION CHARGE**

Rt Revd Dr Joanna Penberthy
Bishop of St Davids Diocese

2020/2021

That I am delivering this address to the Diocese like this simply by video rather than in our Diocesan Conference or at what would have been my Episcopal Visitations is symptomatic of what 2020 has been.

2020 was intended to be a year of celebration: the celebration of the centenary of the Disestablishment of the four Welsh historic diocese from the Church of England and the formation of the province of the Church in Wales. For us, in St Davids, 2020 was also to be the celebration of the 900th anniversary of Dewi Sant's recognition as a saint by the Papacy in Rome. Dewi Sant remains the only one of our Welsh saints to be recognised in this way. At our Diocesan Conference last year, I encouraged us to believe and trust in what God could do in and through us. 2020 has not turned out as we had hoped or planned.

It has been a hard year across the world, across the British Isles and here in Wales. The spread of Covid-19 across the globe has and continues to ravage communities. Families everywhere have lost loved ones. While some people have come through Covid relatively unscathed, others have suffered and continue to suffer with long term effects. Covid 19 has affected people's health but also their livelihoods. Business have gone bankrupt and people have lost their jobs. The governmental systems of the UK and Wales have been tested severely. We have seen the hard work and commitment of our NHS, and the staff of Care Homes and those who care for people in their own home, alongside all those who, in so many different ways, have kept our common life going in these testing times. It has cost some their lives. Those who have so far not contracted the virus have nevertheless endured the lockdown which has taken its toll on everyone's mental health. 2021, post Brexit, was always going to be both challenging and hard for us in Wales. Covid 19 makes those challenges so much harder to negotiate.

Covid 19 has effected us personally and as a diocese. The most obvious of these effects have been seen at church and LMA level. Our Church buildings have been closed in a totally unprecedented fashion. We have been unable to gather together physically to worship God or have fellowship with each other in the usual way. This has been hard. We have missed both the nourishment and the enjoyment being together brings. It is something we have hitherto taken for granted. The process of enabling our Church buildings to be opened was a time-consuming and onerous one. I am grateful to the diligence of Mr Alex Glanville and his team at the Provincial Office for keeping on top of the regulations as they changed and issuing clear guidance which has enabled us to pray and worship together in our Cathedral and our Church

buildings safely. I pay tribute to the hard work of the Archdeacons who have been responsible for ensuring that these guidelines have been adhered to and have offered their unstinting support to clergy and laity who have sought to take advantage of the opportunities the regulations have allowed. It has been an ever changing landscape and I am grateful to clergy and laity across our LMAs who have risen to the challenge of making church happen in these testing times.

In my Presidential Address at last year's Conference, I expressed my trust in God. I said, and I am going to quote, "I trust God to work in you, if you ask him. I trust God to work through you if you let him. We don't have to get it all right, we don't have to become perfect Christians, we just have to open the complexities of our lives to the One who created us, and loves us, who loved us enough to save us from the results of sin, who loves us enough to remake us by his Spirit day by day and moment by moment in a normal ordinary run of the mill sort of way. It isn't about having religious mountain top experiences, it isn't about becoming a prayer warrior, it is simply opening the real you to the real God and learning day by day to love. I trust God to work in and through us as a Diocese. I am going to say that again, I trust God to work in and through us as a Diocese. I trust God to give us the financial resources we need, I trust God to give us the vocations we need. I trust God to make himself known to us and to others through us. God can be trusted to do his part."

Little did I know how testing the forthcoming year was to be for us all. We are not as yet in the happy position of being able to sit comfortably and look back but even from today's perspective, I can see a myriad of ways in which God has supplied us with all that we have needed to get through day by day, albeit often through gritted teeth, this most difficult of times. Like all of you, I have found these last months challenging. To begin with, we did not know what we were facing or how long it would last, we were faced with a Holy Week and Easter like no other. But as I stood and proclaimed "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" and my little congregation of Adrian and my eldest son and daughter in law in the back garden of Llys Esgob responded "He is risen indeed. Alleluia," I knew us to be in the presence of the Risen Christ.

This did not make the following days, weeks and months easy. Even though I have always been happy with my own company, I missed greatly the companionship of my usual routine, with my Chaplain and P.A, with Diocesan colleagues on whom I depend so much. I have missed coming out and being with clergy and parishioners across the Diocese. The relentlessness of Zoom meeting after Zoom meeting without the normal time to process what happened in the meetings and reflect on decisions made, together with the worries and uncertainties of all that we were living through took its toll on me, as it did on all of us. But in all this, I still saw and see the signs of God in Christ at work in our midst. I will never forget the first Zoom service I was invited to. It was during Easter in South West Pembrokeshire LMA and I experienced first hand that it is God's Spirit that binds us together and nourishes and sustains us in worship. Sitting in my study in front of my laptop, I experienced in that service praise, prayer, worship and fellowship in exactly the same way as I do when I come and worship with you face to face. I don't know what I was expecting from a Zoom service but it certainly wasn't that degree of fellowship or that reality of prayer. God was indeed supplying our needs. This was underlined in the Thy Kingdom Come Zoom prayer events, organised by Archdeacon Mones and led by different people from across the Diocese. All the events were

entirely different but on every occasion, each in our own homes, we were all upheld together by the grace of God as we prayed for God's Spirit to move among us. I am very grateful to those who led these Zoom events and to all those who have put services out on facebook or you-tube, some of which have been enjoyed by people across the world as well as within our Diocese. Thank you too to those who have invited me to share worship with them over the last months so that this experience of Christ with us across the miles could be made new each time. This year, as last year, I continue to trust God to make himself known in us and through us.

God made himself known among us through the new ways of modern technology, Zoom, U-tube and Facebook, but also by the well tried and tested means of personal contact. Clergy have prepared newsletters, sermons, service leaflets, some have gone out by email, some by post and some have been hand delivered, parish visiting, outside and socially distanced. Our clergy and lay ministers have continued, when permitted to minister God's grace to people in times of joy and sorrow. Your ingenuity has been tested but you have continued to allow yourself to be channels of God's unceasing grace. As your Bishop, I salute you and for all that you have achieved in these most testing of times.

It is not only our life at local level that has been disrupted. In March, the Diocesan Office building closed, as my office did, we thought for a week, a fortnight. That was not to be. I would like to thank Mr Howard Llewellyn and all the Diocesan staff who have continued to work hard to keep the Diocesan administration working so well. It has not been easy for them, whether working from home or for Mrs Anne Foreman, who has continued to keep going the necessary work in the office building, work that cannot be done except by going inside in person. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all of them.

I am grateful to for the support given to the Dioceses at this testing time by the Representative Body of the Church in Wales. In this our centenary year, the Representative Body have supported the Dioceses through this time of crisis by continuing to make all the payments to our Diocesan Board of Finance that they normally do but without expecting either of the normal payments our DBFs make back to them at the ends of June and September. This enabled our DBF to tell our Churches that the Ministry Share that the DBF normally asks of them in June and September would not be asked for this year. In our centenary year God has used the past generosity of our forbears and the good stewardship of Representative Body and of our DBF to meet our needs today.

Covid 19 hit us at a time in our Diocesan life when we were coming to the end of the reorganisation of our parishes in Local Ministry Areas, necessitated by our need to ensure the ongoing financial viability of our Diocese. It has been a difficult process and it is not something we would have chosen to do but as I met with the LMA Chairs or other Lay representatives of the LMAs on Zoom in the summer, in three archdeaconry meetings, I heard much that spoke of hope. The advantages of working together with others, being able to share expertise and experience and to make links with congregations over a wider area and to do things together were becoming clear. As I said last year, I am deeply grateful to Canon Marianne and her transition team and to the clergy and laity of the Diocese for the hard work and commitment you have shown over this time of change which came to its close, when I inaugurated Dyffryn Teifi, the last LMA to be formed, on Tuesday 15th September this year. Canon Marianne and

the transition Team have borne the heat of the day and will continue to be available to help LMA teams across the Diocese as you seek to explore how you can be church together in your areas. I am grateful for the dedication of my Registrar Mr Arwel Davies and my former Registrar, Mr Anthony Jenkins who, together with the team at the Provincial Office saw to the legal side of our reorganisation. I am deeply grateful for the help and advice of the Bishop and Diocesan team at St Asaph, who had walked this way before us. Their help was invaluable. A huge thank you too to Archdeacon Paul, whose gifts of administration and procedure have been vital. I also commend the hard work of the Diocesan Secretary and his staff team, together with Chair and members of the DBF for the unstinting and imaginative ways they have and are trying to ensure they can support the LMAs in every practical way possible through these changes. They have listened to what people on the ground have told them they need in order for the practicalities of the LMAs to work well and are doing their best to supply it or signpost people to where the most appropriate help and support can be found.

I would like to salute the Archdeacons, clergy and laity of this diocese of St Davids for working with this process, even though it was not what any one of us would have chosen and continuing to ensure that we fulfil our calling to worship God, to serve God's world and to proclaim God's love to the communities in which we are set. My thanks to Canon Rhiannon Johnson and all on her Ministry Team for ensuring that all who serve in whatever capacity in St Davids are properly discerned, trained and supported in the ministries they undertake on our behalf. I am profoundly grateful for the extra miles that Canon Rhiannon has gone in ensuring that we have been fed and nourished by the resources she has written and made available and for the resourcefulness and hard work of the Archdeacons, LMA Teams and LMA councils who have kept our local presence alive during this difficult time.

Since March, we have experienced together something we usually only experience alone or in our families or friendship groups or glimpse in news reports about the lives of others: that human life on this planet is often hard. Some of us will live through Covid 19 relatively unscathed. Others have lost their lives or loved ones. Others who have been a part of the heroic response of medical or care staff, or of the services we rely upon that have continued to look after us during these difficult days have paid a heavy price. In all this, and alongside the heroism and dedication of those at the frontline, we have seen the shortcomings of UK's current political culture and governmental structure laid bare: in times like these, experts and dedicated public servants are exactly what we need. Who knew?! The flaws in the oft repeated mantra of the last decade or so that the market can solve everything have been terrifyingly revealed.

Is that any of the Church's business? What is the Bishop doing being so political? It is definitely the Church's business because we are all adult members of this our British democracy and the conduct of our common life is very much our concern, the concern of all of us, cleric or lay person. Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, told the apostles before he was taken from their sight, to go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus had spent the final years of his earthly life teaching his disciples what it means to be a disciple, a pupil, a follower of Jesus. We have four collections of Jesus' teachings, the Gospels of Sts Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and all letters of the New Testament, some written by those who knew Jesus, the letter of James and 1 Peter and Jude, or by St Paul, who received the gospel by direct revelation, a revelation the

veracity of which he said he checked against the teaching of the apostles whom he met. Those letters, together with the teaching of Jesus recorded in the gospels, are quite clear: our Christian faith is meant to impact and effect how we live and to enable us to make a positive contribution to the societies in which we live.

This doesn't mean that Christians will agree about which policies or which political parties they support but what we all have to agree upon is the test we apply to policies we support: does it draw us nearer to or further from the kingdom of God that we as Christians are called to make real in our lives. Using that test won't make us agree necessarily on the sort of government or policies we want but it gives a common ground on which to learn from each other and work together despite our disagreements for the common good: to be the salt and light Jesus commands us to be.

The reorganisation we have just finished was not an end in itself. We have not been on a quest to find the perfect structure. What we have been attempting to do is find out how to use wisely the resources at our disposal to do well in our day what the Church has always been called to do: to make disciples of all nations and together learn to live as disciples, pupils following the Way, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the complex realities of our daily lives. As we reach the end of our structural changes, this remains our goal.

So where next? Part of the journey of the next three years will be to pick up the threads of development and change begun under my predecessor, Bishop Wyn. The ministry of NSM(L)s will be the clerical bedrock of our local churches, while Focal ministers will be the gel of our local church communities so that the other Non-Stipendiary and the Stipendiary ministers can take on a role more of the oversight and development of all sorts of ministries in the LMAs. The Fellowship of Vocations will remain crucial in enabling Christians in our diocese to discern together how God is calling them to be salt and light, and for some, this will mean enabling the ministry of others, following a vocation to some kind of recognised ministry in the Church, whether clerical or lay, whether pastoral or educational, working with youth and children or evangelistic. I am grateful to the Revd Robb Wainright for bringing the Fellowship of Vocations to St Davids, for his enthusiasm and hard work and to all the Fellowship of Vocations Chaplains for helping people in our diocese work through what God is calling them to do in their lives. My thanks to Canon John Bennett for taking over leadership of the Fellowship, now that Robb and Lindy have moved back to Yorkshire.

Our project to found Centres of Mission, another focus of mission and ministry begun in the Diocese by Bishop Wyn, have had a boost from the Provincial Evangelism Fund. In February of this year, we received almost £2 million which will enable them to continue and enable the 9 members of staff to contribute a fifth of their time to help the LMAs, as the LMAs seek to plant churches and bring adults to faith and baptism. We now have three centres of Mission, the Centre at Merlin's Bridge was set up by Bishop Wyn and funded from the Bishop's Strategy Fund and now the next stage of its journey will be funded from the Evangelism Fund. I would like to pay tribute to Sister Val Legg who set up the Centre and who has worked closely with Revd Heather Cale, the Head of the local Church in Wales' school and the Pioneer Evangelists, Mrs Ruth Busisa and Ms Molly Baldwin, who is covering Ruth's maternity leave, to sow the seeds of faith in the local community. Sister Val is leaving us to take up a new post in the Church of England but she leaves a thriving Centre behind. With

the support of the Provincial Evangelism Fund, two more centres are being set up, one in Llanelli led by the Revd Captain Rob Lowe and one in Crosshands. These Centres of Mission now come under the aegis of the Fourth Archdeaconry, led by Archdeacon Mones. The Centres of Mission are projects to help us learn as a Diocese how we can plant churches and how we can evangelise and bring adults to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and, with us, to be salt and light in the world. Archdeacon Mones, with his team, is also working to help LMAs learn how to plant churches so get in touch!

Our Diocese is not just our LMAs and the Fourth Archdeaconry. The next three years will be also a journey of doing the best we can to support the mission and ministry of our Cathedral, our Church Schools, Plant Dewi, Tir Dewi and other work of the Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility, otherwise known as the DCSR.

I thank Dean Sarah, and all the Cathedral team who have been, throughout this time, our mother Church and indeed encouraging the nation with their broadcasts from the beginning of lockdown. Who can forget Canon Canon Leigh's sublime singing of the Exsultet in the Easter Vigil not to mention the brilliant little film in which he persuaded all sorts of people to do the actions to Dewi Sant's last words, "Be joyful, keep the faith and do the little things?" If you have forgotten this or never saw it, it is still on our website.

The mention of our website brings me to to our Communications Team under the leadership of David Hammond-Williams. Without David and the team, we would have been at sea, alone and isolated. Pobl Dewi continued to be the glue that keeps our diocese together under Tessa Briggs, thank you so much to the contributors and Tessa's editorial team. The whole team's work in so many different ways, kept us in contact with one another and indeed in prayer together. Putting out the daily morning and evening prayer services meant that David did not have a day off for months. I am deeply deeply grateful.

I pay tribute to our Church Schools all open to provide education to our children even in this difficult time. I am particularly grateful to those schools, and the heads and teachers, who provided education all through the lockdown to the children of front-line workers, who were keeping our common life going.

I am also so proud of all those who work so tirelessly in Plant Dewi, under the leadership of Mrs Catrin Eldred and Tir Dewi, lead by Mr Gareth Davies and all the work of the DCSR under the dedicated leadership of the Revd Delyth Wilson. Along with the M.U. led by Mrs Heather Witt, they are quite literally changing lives. They are part of how we can be salt and light in our communities. In my first three years, I spent time visiting every Church School and every Plant Dewi centre and project and have been uplifted and inspired by what I have seen. It is my hope, when it becomes possible, to visit every MU Union branch in this coming year.

We have a lot to do over the next three years as we going forward to what will be our next anniversary, an anniversary I devoutly hope we will be able to celebrate together in more usual ways. In 2023 we will be celebrating the 900th anniversary of Pope Callixtus II making St Davids Cathedral a place of pilgrimage, something he did in 1120. As we build up to this celebration, each of the next three years will have its own focus, which will take us further not just to the 900th anniversary in 2023 but in our own Christian journey, as individuals and together. From this Advent, 2020, we set out on a year of deepening our prayer. Don't wait

for the Church to provide you with resources. Hopefully your LMAs particularly next Lent can encourage you on your journey of prayer but this is one of the things that doesn't need expertise because each of us has the best of all possible prayer guides: the Holy Spirit. Take the plunge and ask the Holy Spirit to help you learn afresh how to pray. If you want advice, by all means ask someone in your LMA team for help but the key is just to tell God what is on your heart and to open your eyes to see and hear God's answers in the scriptures you read, the events that befall you and the people you come across. "Put me to the proof" God says through the prophet Malachi. Put God to the proof this year and learn more about prayer and living your life prayerfully. This will be our journey from Advent 2020.

In Advent 2021, we set out on a year of discipleship and from Advent 2022, a year of pilgrimage, but pilgrimage not only to our old stones, to our beloved church buildings where our saints prayed but also to places, all sorts of places, where we can see the love of God in action today. Keep your eyes on our Diocesan website where tips and resources will appear.

So prayer, discipleship and pilgrimage, a three stage Diocesan journey to help us follow Jesus together, to share our faith in Him with others and live as citizens of the kingdom of God in this His world, being salt and light. We can set out with hope. In this difficult year, we have discovered God working in and through us despite everything. As I said last year, I repeat this year, I believe that in whatever befalls us in the year ahead, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will be our companion and our guide and provide us with all that we need to share his love with others.

This is serving as both the Charge that I would have given at my triennial Visitations in June as well as the Presidential Address at the October Diocesan Conference. So I am going to set you a task. I am going to ask each LMA to respond to just this one question: What three goals are you going to set yourself as an LMA in these years of prayer and discipleship so that you will be ready to go out as pilgrims into your local community? What three specific goals are you going to work towards so that you are better able to find where God is working and join in and to draw people into your community of faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

It's a long one question but it boils down to what three things are your LMA going to do to share faith and bring others to love, follow and serve Jesus in your area.

In the year of pilgrimage, 2023, in my pilgrimage across the Diocese, God willing, I shall visit each LMA and ask you to tell me what has happened on your journey of trying to implement your goals. I shan't be checking up on whether you achieved the goals you set for yourself because our God is a God of surprises and when we set out with Him, we do not always know where that will lead, but I will be interested to hear about the journey that started with your three goals. So LMA Deans and LMA Chairs, please work out a process of deciding on your three goals and once you have decided on them, send details of them to my office by March 28th 2021 so they can be the focus of our postponed 2020 Diocesan Conference on April 17th 2021, as we set out on the next stage of our journey together.

May God bless you richly as you draw near to Him, may He give you strength to endure all that may befall you and the grace to know His presence with you, day by day. Amen.