



Diocesan Conference April 2021: Presidential Address
by Rt Revd Dr Joanna Penberthy, Bishop of St Davids Diocese

As we meet together at the end of this our Diocesan Conference, amidst all the uncertainties that lie ahead, there are things of which we are sure: we are still called as God's people to fulfil, as best we may, our Lord's mandate to us to go and make disciples here and to fulfil His call to share our faith in Him and to live as His disciples being salt and light in our families, our villages, our communities, our towns, our nation, our society and our world.

In our conference, we rightly address the practical matters of our what enables our life together, as the Diocese of St Davids, and at the beginning of our Conference, I expressed my thanks to all of you, who have upheld our common life through these most testing of times. The practical matters of good organisation and finance are foundations upon which everything else rests and that which make our common life of mission, ministry and service possible.

In my Visitation Charge delivered in January of this year, I asked each LMA to give me three priorities that they would be working towards in the three years ahead. These priorities are not to be straitjackets to which to tie yourselves, but trajectories of imagination and hope, as the next steps in our journey of discipleship, mission and service within and into the communities in we live, the communities into which God calls us to live and share the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So that when I visit each of the LMAs in the 2023 year of Pilgrimage, I can hear from you the story of your journey from this point.

As I read your responses, I was overwhelmed by the breadth of your vision, your dedication at this hardest of times and your hope, all so obviously rooted in your love of God, your faith in our Lord, and your willingness to be channels of God's grace by the power of the Holy Spirit made real in and through you. Every LMA's response was specific and unique, which showed just how much you had looked at your own situation and asked for wisdom.

Just as we address the practical matters in this conference, it was appropriate that some LMAs noted how important it was to develop good management and financial structures to be the foundation from which their mission and ministry might grow.

One LMA expressed their gratitude to the Revd Jeff Thomas and the provision of the Diocesan Office finance package for their practical help. Another used the SMART acronym as a way to plan their three goals in management mission and ministry, to set goals that are specific measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound.

Another said they would conduct a 360 review of the provision of church services and pastoral needs across the LMA as they come out of Covid. Another noted the need to ensure a proper relationship between their LMA Council and the Church Councils while others noted the need to ensure there were officers, another that there was a functioning LMA Council and

that the Ministry Team met regularly and worked out properly how to develop a vision for working across a geographically large LMA.

One LMA noted three flavours, my word not theirs, which would mark every outreach they make into their communities.

Firstly, everything they would do in mission and outreach would be grounded in prayer. Secondly, their outreach projects would be about hospitality and welcome and therefore, they would be local and specific so not necessarily LMA with a big L but within local communities, relevant and specific and finally content to accompany what was already going on, not necessary leading and imposing but being content to be into the warp and weft.

Prayer was a big theme for many LMAs: as one LMA noted, it must be at the heart of all that we do. Many LMAs hope to encourage people to learn to pray both those already within and those not yet in contact with the church. One LMA intends to deepen its prayer life and to open their Church life to the power of God's Holy Spirit. Some LMAs are planning prayer courses and to use resources that are already available, prayer 24/7 for example or to use the traditional seasons of the Church's year: Advent, Lent, Thy Kingdom Come and new ones like Creationtide. Others are planning mediation groups, silent prayer groups, prayer walks, prayer talk and walks groups, Pilgrimages and to make sure that prayer resources they provide are age appropriate, for younger and for older people.

The possibilities of continuing to use the new technology for prayer and for services has excited many. Some LMAs are keen to learn more about how to do it. Some LMAs are no longer reaching people just within their own geographical boundaries, and this isn't about pinching their neighbours congregations but literally attracting people from across the world, and I don't just mean the Cathedral!

LMAs have seen the potential of the new digital space and some who have literal open spaces, churchyards and other such spaces, are thinking about how these too can be offered as quiet reflective spaces for people to use for prayer.

Many LMAs spoke of the need to engage with issues of Climate Change, some linking this with helping each church building in the LMA achieve eco church awards, with one planning to develop a community produce allotment. Another hopes to make links with local bee keepers so as to learn how to make the Churchyards bee friendly. This will both work towards gaining eco Church awards and deepen community links.

Deepening community links was another major theme. All sorts of different things are being planned. In rural LMAs people spoke of organising community events such as Tractor runs or those linked with Christian festivals such as Good Friday, Plough Sunday, or Nativity plays. One LMA is planning to start a Christian presence at a local car boot sale, another is exploring the possibility of starting a local shop, market and cafe within some of their village communities, while another LMA is going to try to find a permanent home for their already existing drop in centre.

There are plans elsewhere to develop a faith trail, making the most of the mission potential of the wonderful Christian heritage of their historic church buildings and the local communities that have grown up around them over the centuries. Other imaginative ideas for community outreach include setting up a choir drawn from across an LMA to sing a scratch Messiah and forming a multi age drama group that will encourage people of all ages, including young people, to join in. Another LMA has plans to re-establish lunch clubs, as well as discerning new ways of serving local families in practical ways.

Communication was also a theme, using the new ways of modern technology, but also setting up a Church newspaper, while others are hoping to use the local newspapers and local websites and existing local social media presence.

Addressing the needs of young people in are Diocese were high on the agenda of many LMAs and some are working towards having a dedicated Youth Worker, with one LMA having a new one already in place. One LMA hopes to partner with Scripture Union. Other LMAs are planning Messy Church or services tailored with families in mind or aimed specifically at youth culture. People hope to work with schools, set up after school clubs, make links with colleges, hold fun days, picnics, run youth groups, youth choirs, all these were mentioned as hopes for the future. One LMA wants to set up a youth worship band. Just as face to face churches have children's work, one of the new online church communities spoke of their continuing to include within their online presence a children and youth group.

One LMA aims to strengthen the links with the Plant Dewi project in the LMA that were already being forged before Lockdown.

World Mission was not forgotten either. One LMA has made links with a person working in support work abroad through their online service and they hope to continue to be able to offer this support in whatever way is possible in the future. Others mentioned supporting agencies such as Tearfund.

Pastoral care is always important but paying attention to it in the current circumstances was noted by many of you. As well as the needs of young people, the needs of the elderly and those who will find it difficult in coming back to church as that becomes possible was highlighted. Developing Anna Chaplaincy was a project noted by two LMAs.

Evangelistic mission was very much on the agenda. There are plans in one LMA to continue a Church without walls Zoom service started during the pandemic, while another LMA is planting two new congregations, one physical and ecumenical and the other one online. There's one LMA, that intends to develop appropriate pastoral provision for church people as well as at the same time encourage those very same Christian communities to prioritise outreach into the local areas they are called to serve. A few LMAs who have seen the potential of their online presence during the pandemic very much want to explore the missional potential that online church offers going forward.

One LMA spoke of reforging engagement and fellowship with the church fellowship and with church groups that met before the pandemic but also then renewing their mission and outreach plans with their LMA's new Working Group on the Way Ahead. Another LMA is

encouraging each pastoral area to develop their own mission and ministry strategies but together the pastoral areas are planning an Interdenominational Mission Initiative next Easter. Another LMA is going to hold a mission with the Fourth Archdeaconry team to reach out to those on the fringes and using this to give Church people experience in sharing their faith. Tried and tested mission activities such as Alpha groups are also being planned in a number of LMAs.

One LMA hoped to explore the potential of CMS' Partnership for Missional Church as a way of developing its outreach into the community. While another LMA is going to explore Mike Breen's concept of "Building a Discipling Church:"

LMAs have shared their priorities with me for which I am very grateful, thank you.

In turn, in this conference, members have been asked to discuss what they think the Diocese's three priorities should be in the years ahead. The responses that you give today will be gathered and discussed by the Standing Committee and the common threads presented back to you for discussion at our Conference in October this year. Furthermore because we have debated a motion today that allows LMA councils to bring motions to this Conference, the voice of people across the Diocese can from now on feed into our counsels at Conference and begin to determine how our Diocese sets our priorities. I would urge you to make the most of this.

At the beginning of this conference, I thanked each of you for all that you had done, for ensuring that the life of this Diocese continued during this difficult times. One of the new things that has emerged during this period has been a new way of learning how to make our priorities concrete. The Diocesan Board of Finance Budget Committee under its Chair Mr Tim Llewellyn has developed an excellent new way of putting together the Diocesan Budget. The Budget is now put together after consulting with stake holders as to what the priorities for future spending should be. This year's Budget has already been put together but as the Standing Committee considers the priorities of this conference in its meetings over this coming year, your priorities as the Standing Committee communicates with the DBF can inform the forming of the budget for 2023. This we can enlarge upon in the conference later this year. It is my hope that the prayers, hopes and visions of this Conference and its Standing Committee, underpinned by the work of our Diocesan Board of Finance can increasingly be the centre of our life together as we seek to serve our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in this Diocese of St Davids.

There is one response from the LMAs I have left until the end: one LMA wishes to attend to wellbeing. We have all been marked by this year that we have just lived through. We have all been marked and changed by it. Some of the ways in which we have been affected we already know, some of the ways in which it has changed us, we shall find out slowly, as and when life opens up. I do not say, returns to normal because it will not be as it was before, it will not be normal. There are those who have died and who will not be with us when we can meet together again. We miss them and we shall have to forge our life together anew. We shall need to be kind to one another.

We shall need to attend to each other's wellbeing. It will not be the responsibility just of the clergy to attend to the wellbeing of the laity or of the laity to attend to the wellbeing of the clergy. Together, Bishop, clergy, laity, we are, all in that beautiful ancient name for the whole church, "The Faithful" , and as we move on however slowly through this experience into whatever lies ahead, , we need, together, as the Faithful, to attend to the wellbeing of one another.

What we can be sure of in this Easter season with Ascension and Pentecost ahead, is that the Risen Ascended Jesus stands with us through all that we go through and equips us together afresh each day by his Holy Spirit. In this year of prayer, I ask each one of you, to deepen your own walk with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that come Advent, we may all be ready again each following the call Jesus has for us to renew our own Discipleship and call others to follow Him.

Thank you for sharing your hopes and plans with me. In 2023, I shan't be coming to check up on you but I shall be coming to hear the story of your journey and to rejoice with you in all that God has done in, through and with you as you open yourself to Him and to those you will touch as you reach out into your communities in His name in these years of prayer and discipleship.

The God of Peace who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ the great Shepherd of the Sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant make you perfect in every good deed to do his will, creating in you that which is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ , to whom be glory for ever and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always, Amen.

+Joanna St Davids

