

From Listening to Speaking Signposts for the Future



The Bishop of Coventry

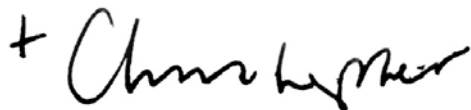
Pentecost 2009

Introduction

'For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4.20). So said Peter and John. I feel the same. Since my installation in November I have been in *looking and listening mode*. It has been great fun and I am indebted to all of you who have allowed me to listen to you and to see what God is doing in and through you. I hope that I will remain permanently in the mode of looking and listening. For how else can Bishops fulfill their calling to 'know their people'?¹ But the apostolic call to us all in Christian leadership, lay and ordained, and especially to Bishops, is *to speak* on the basis of what we have seen and heard. This is speaking of the work of God we have seen in Jesus Christ. Necessarily, though, the apostolic message of what God has done, is doing and will do in Christ includes the Church. This is because the transformation of Christ's people into bearers and agents of the kingdom of God is the evidence of the messiahship of Jesus and the completion of God's purposes in and through him.

So I am glad to be able to speak to you today and to write to those who cannot be here of the work of God that I have seen in you and to point to some directions where I think God may be leading us together in these days. I hope that this will be a stage in an ongoing circularity of movement of listening and speaking, discerning and deciding, asking and acting.²

I am grateful to Bishop's Staff and to Bishop's Council for their help in shaping my words. At the same time I should say, that although this document has evolved through collaboration with colleagues, it is not a formal Diocesan policy statement honed through our Synodical processes. It is much more on the lines of a Bishop's Note Book - and only the first few pages of that, with no attempt to be exhaustive.³

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Chris Lymer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. To the left of the name is a small cross symbol.

¹ *Common Worship*, 'Ordination and Consecration of Bishops'.

² The next stage in the life of this document will be a structured discussion at the July Diocesan Synod.

³ Other 'pages' can be found in my Presidential Addresses to Diocesan Synod in November 2008 and March 2009 available on the Diocesan Web-Site.

Purpose

It has been a joy to join a Diocese which has a clearly articulated understanding of its purpose in Christ. I enjoyed working with the Purpose Statement's themes (worship, mission and community transformation) in my Study Day with the Clergy soon after I began. In my travels since then I have listened out for views on it and looked out for evidence of it being fulfilled. It seems to me that people are happy with it and that is serving us well. So, to help us make best use of this gift of common direction we have been given, I have seven proposals.

- 1) We return to the original and simplest form of the statement, thus:
 - Worshipping God
 - Making new disciples
 - Transforming communities

- 2) We recognize that the Statement requires filling out with everything that it includes but does not make explicit.⁴ Among these, there are two themes that are close to my heart at the moment. You may have others. Let's find a way of keeping ourselves agile theologically, ecclesially and missionally, by developing a theological commentary on the Statement.

These are the two themes that are hidden within the Statement that I would like us to think about.

- a. *Teaching the Faith*: The challenge of our times makes teaching the faith an urgent priority. It runs throughout our purpose.
Our worship is to teach the faith, through word and sacrament, song and symbol, so that the 'word of Christ dwells in us richly' (Colossians 3.16).

⁴ The place of the ministry of reconciliation in the self-understanding of the Diocese is relevant here (see my comments towards the end of this document).

Our evangelistic and formational processes are to involve the most effective methods of learning the faith so that new disciples can be taught to 'obey everything that Jesus commanded' (Matthew 28.20).

Our engagement with local communities to see them raised closer to the kingdom of God requires us to 'account for the hope that is in us' (1 Peter 3.15).

- b. *Shaping of Society*: In a year that has thrown the world into near economic chaos and submerged the nation into disillusionment with its parliamentary systems, the Church's service to society as a shaper of values has seldom been more needed. Both the economic and political failures have been caused in a large part by a loss of moral mooring. In these days when we have seen money and power abused through incremental steps away from virtues which Christian Faith once embedded in society, there is an urgent need for the Church to use its many means to contribute the deep wisdom of our ancient tradition to the reshaping of public life in our time.

Again, this involves all three parts of our purpose statement, especially the third. My question to myself and to us all is how we can use our inherited gifts of engagement with society to better effect.

There is one element of our life - all too easy to underestimate or even to overlook - that concerns both of these areas, especially as we reach out to transform communities. That is the extraordinary potential of our work with schools, colleges and universities, most particularly, of course, our 74 Church Schools. I am deeply impressed with the commitment of the Head Teachers of our Schools that I have met to teach the Christian Faith and to shape the society that our young people will inhabit. The history of our land and Church has given us a remarkable responsibility - the educational care of hundreds of children and young people, most of whose parents positively choose to send their children to our Schools.

- 3) We do not attempt to prescribe how our three-fold purpose is fulfilled locally but encourage Parishes, Benefices, Deaneries, Chaplaincies, Schools and other Christian communities to discern *how they* are being called to fulfill this calling to worship God, make new disciples and transform communities. Such encouragement may need to be more intentional. Some Dioceses, for example, ask all their communities, and in some cases whole Deaneries, to devise Mission Action Plans. We could do the same in terms of local application of our overall purposes. That's something to think about.
- 4) We celebrate our common calling with other Christians to worship God, make new disciples and transform communities and welcome opportunities to join with others in all three spheres, particularly in evangelistic endeavour and community engagement.⁵ Indeed, our engagement with local communities is often an opportunity for co-operation with those of other faith communities.
- 5) We make more disciplined use of the Purpose Statement in our common life, for example, on web-sites, parish profiles and other publicity.
- 6) Bishop John and I use the Purpose Statement as a way of focusing our ministries.
- 7) The Purpose Statement is used as a simple three-year curriculum for Bishops' Study Days and other training events.

⁵ The Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church places a particular commitment upon us to seek out ways of working for the kingdom of God with our Methodist brothers and sisters. At the same time we need to keep alert to the changing pattern of ecumenical relationships on the ground, particularly among the new churches and also with the significant Roman Catholic presence in the Diocese.

- a. In this connection, I am glad to say that Richard Giles will be the main speaker at the Clergy Study Day on November 2nd, which will take place in the Education Centre at the Ricoh Stadium. Richard will help us think more about our call to *worship God*.
- b. I would like to introduce another training event in the Spring/Summer period open to all licensed ministers as well as clergy. In 2010 this will take the form of a Celebration of Preaching organised by the College of Preachers in their anniversary year which is due to take place in the Cathedral on Saturday 12th June 2010. It will be an opportunity to be better equipped to preach in worship.

In summary, in different ways but with a common purpose, let us press on, determined to *deepen* our worship of God, *increase* our making of new disciples and *extend* our transformation of communities.

Strategy

If we know as a Diocese what we are here for (our purpose) how, as a Diocese, do we achieve what we are called to do? What is our strategy? As I have said, much will depend on prayerful discernment and faithful ministry at a very local level. The missionary situation that we face is too complex and the Church of England too varied for there to be one catch-all strategy that will work in each situation. Multiple strategies are called for, finely adapted to the particular ecosystems of place and people. At the same time, the Diocese has a key role in nurturing an overarching climate, a culture in which the mission of the Church on the ground can be nurtured and sustained. We might say that the Diocesan strategy is to liberate effective local strategies.⁶

⁶ In military language, it is a case of one strategy with many and varied tactics.

In my own thinking I have been much helped by the first section of the Charge given to me by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the Confirmation of my Election as your Diocesan Bishop. The genesis of the Charge began as the Diocese's own Statement of Needs compiled in the early stages of the search for a new Bishop. This is how it reads.

Release the missionary energies of the Diocese of Coventry by building the capacity of the Church, and through your own teaching and preaching.

It is a fine statement on the nature of the Church. I like the way it speaks of *releasing energies* and avoids any implication that I can create them. I gather the Diocese's Statement of Needs had '*unleash the missionary energies*'. That might be even better: the Church carried by the Wild Goose of the Celtic mission who cannot be constrained; the Church riding on the Lion of Judah who roars with righteous love; the Church as the Pilgrim People of God marching unstopably to the promised land. The Church as the Body of Christ comes with missionary energies as part of the deal. To follow the Messiah is to be a messianic people.

How, then, are these missionary energies to be released? Well the statement offers two suggestions:

- by building up the capacity of the Church and
- through episcopal teaching and preaching.

Good advice, I think. Good advice for all of us involved in leadership in the Church. In parishes and benefices and other Christian communities, the missionary energy of the Church is released through strategic activity that builds the capacity of the Church by shaping the Church for mission (rather like an engineer skillfully designing and redesigning the hardware of a computer to maximize its potential) and through a faithful ministry of the word (which, as well as building the capacity of others for mission, is also a missionary act itself).

Good advice also for your Bishops.

Permit me a little aside. For some time I have come to the view that a good deal of priestly ministry has an inherently episcopal character about it and increasingly so in the present life of the Church of England. By this I mean that priestly ministry often involves *episcopate* – oversight of the Church’s life. I have called it the *episcopate of the presbyterate*.⁷ I trace it back to Acts 20.28⁸, a verse I had inscribed on my crozier, where Paul is giving his farewell address to the Ephesian elders (*presbuteroi*): ‘Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his Own’.

This conviction runs alongside an increasing recognition of the *apostolic character*⁹ of the ministry of those called to exercise the actual office of *Episcopos* (the Greek word for overseer, or bishop). Of course, all Christians are called to be *apostolic* (literally, ‘those who are sent’). In a very real way we all share in Christ’s sending of the original Apostles and to uphold that apostolic faith. The embodiment of that ministry in those on whom hands have been laid in succession to the Apostles (that is, Bishops) is for the *fuller realization of that sending in the life of the whole Church*. In other words, Bishops are here to order the Church for mission.

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians: ‘Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up’ (2 Corinthians 12.19). How can we as Bishops build you up so that you can more fully participate in the Lord’s sending? How can we liberate your apostolicity and how can you liberate our apostolicity? How do we help each other to be the people Christ sends?

I want to say more about this in a moment, but first I want to refer to two proposals that you may have heard about already.

⁷ See my *Being a Priest Today* with Rosalind Brown.

⁸ Paul is giving his farewell address to the Ephesian elders (*presbuteroi*): ‘Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his Own’.

⁹ The original sending of the Apostles is most clearly seen in Mark 3.13-19.

- 1) The first is to make use of a proportion of the surplus from the 2007 and 2008 budgets together with some accumulated funds from the Church Commissioners and other sources given for the mission of the Diocese, to create two Mission funds (a total of £650,000). If approved by Diocesan Synod, one will be managed by the Diocesan Mission Fund Committee. Benefices and Deaneries will be able to apply to it for projects that aim in some way to make new disciples. The other will be managed by the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (currently Bishop's Council) and will allow me to fund particular projects and posts for the growth of the Church. This is only one small step towards the building of the capacity of the Church but it is a step in the right direction.

- 2) The second proposal is that Bishop John and I work with you to be intentional about our missionary ministry in the Diocese. As suggested earlier, we want to use the Purpose Statement as way of focusing and testing our activity. Are we giving sufficient time and energy to the leading of worship, the making of new disciples¹⁰ and the transformation of communities?

¹⁰ Three practical matters here: (1) As I mentioned in a pastoral letter, from 2010 I would like to move the Cathedral Easter Vigil with the Liturgy of Initiation to an early morning start on Easter Sunday. Bishop John and I would be willing to offer another date to the Coventry Deaneries for an additional Confirmation for those for whom the early morning is just too inhospitable if that would be helpful. (2) Bishop John and I are very keen to baptize at Confirmation services, not least as a way of more fully expressing our missionary ministry (as well as modelling a more coherent approach to Confirmation), so we would encourage (but by no means require) you to hold back the baptism of adults to a Confirmation service. (3) I am planning to lead a pilgrimage to the Taizé Community in 2010. I want to work with a small group of youth leaders in the Diocese to gather a large group of young people, some of whom will already be committed Christians, others – I hope – will be much more on the edge of the Faith.

Some strategic decisions

As well as being inspired by the Archbishop's Charge, I have also been much helped by what has become known as the Glenfall Statement. It evolved during a residential meeting of Bishop's Council in 2004 and was incorporated into the Diocese's Statement of Needs. It formed the theological backdrop to the Purpose Statement. It reads thus:

The Bishop's Council affirms its belief in Christ as Lord of the Church and its commitment to all people of our Diocese. In a spiritually hungry and changing society, we recognize God is calling us to new forms of mission and ministry. We believe the vision and motivation for mission and ministry should spring from and be resourced by local communities of faith.

Discussion at the recent residential meeting of Bishop's Council revealed that the original discussion in 2004 envisaged more a cyclical movement between the 'local community' of Parish-Benefice-Deanery *etc* and the 'centre community' of Bishop and Council *etc*. In other words, it involves an ongoing conversation - with support and accountability built into it - between Bishop and Priest in a ministry which is 'both mine and yours'. With that significant nuance, the present Council endorsed the Statement.

Like the Archbishop's Charge it is a good piece of theology. I welcome its affirmation of the Lordship of Christ over the Church, its recognition of the urgent missionary challenge, its invitation to the Church to be agile and creative and its insistence that the life of the Church is generated on the ground. The Statement also helps to explain why there has been an increasing devolution of responsibility to Deaneries.

In my mind, Deaneries are a response to the large size of Dioceses in Northern Europe. Originally Dioceses were towns or cities. Then, as the Church expanded, they became regions. Deaneries evolved as sub-regions of Dioceses. They are not the ground. That is the parish, benefice or other community. But they are closer to the ground than more centralized Diocesan systems, and the Rural/Area Dean is closer to the ground than the Bishop (or Archdeacon). Generally Deaneries are not the agent of mission. That will remain the most local

community of faith – the Parish or Benefice, Chaplaincy or other Christian community. But they are a local support and structure for mission.

To cut a long story short, I have been impressed with what I have seen of the Deanery Structure in parts of the Diocese. It is by no means uniform but where it works, I have seen the seeds of effective missionary strategy operating through it. I am also impressed with what I have seen of the use of Deaneries in two other Dioceses which have a strong commitment to mission – the Dioceses of Southwell and Nottingham and of Bristol, and I am grateful to their Archdeacons for helpful conversations.

Here are two more proposals to share with you. Again you may have heard of both.

- 1) The Parish Share Review Group has now reported to Bishop's Council and proposed a method of parish share which has gained 'in principle' support of the Council. It has a long journey of consultation ahead but if adopted it will devolve a greater level of responsibility to the Deaneries.
- 2) I would like us *to consider* redesigning the number and structures of the Deaneries in order to:
 - a. further devolve responsibilities to the Deanery by means of a more effective and streamlined form of Deanery leadership and administration;¹¹

¹¹ A possible model would be:

A part-stipended Rural-Area Dean

An Assistant Rural-Area Dean

Administrative support (which could be shared by Deaneries)

Some form of 'Deanery Cabinet' made up of Dean, Assistant Dean, Lay Chair and some other members part-elected by Deanery Synod and part-appointed by the Bishop. This body could fulfill the functions of the Deanery Pastoral and Mission Committee. However, no doubt other models will emerge as the exploration and implementation process proceeds.

- b. better resource the Rural-Area Dean and accompanying structures of leadership.

In the light of the strategic direction of these proposals, and after a good deal of consultation, I am intending to deal with the vacancy of the Archdeacon of Warwick in the following way.

I will appoint a successor to Michael Paget-Wilkes who (if 'it seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us') will help us over a fixed period of time to merge our two Archdeaconries into one, with the concentration of a statutory archidiaconal ministry in the ministry of one Archdeacon and the redistribution of other responsibilities to enhanced Rural/Area Deans with commensurate resourcing.¹² Having completed this work, the post-holder will then assume other responsibilities in this Diocese or elsewhere. So, the intention at this point is that we will continue with two Archdeacons for a transitional period.¹³

¹² As some will know, an alternative scenario has been discussed. That is of appointing an 'Implementation Officer' rather than an Archdeacon. There would be some advantages to this but having taking advice I have come to a mind that an Archdeacon would be a more appropriate appointment for the Diocese at this point. These are some of the reasons: it is vital that clergy and other ministers are well-supported pastorally; this is an important part of an Archdeacon's ministry; the level of Archidiaconal work to be generated by the forthcoming Terms of Service for Clergy (including the implementation of the new Ministerial Review) is unknown; it will be safer for the Diocese to have another Archdeacon in post while this is being tested out; the envisaged change in shape of the Diocese will require some careful and complex ecclesiastical navigation; this is what Archdeacons do; the absence of a second Archdeacon in a period of transition could leave the Rural / Area Deans insufficiently supported just at the point when more is being expected of them; the absence of a second Archdeacon in a period of transition will draw the Bishops into levels of details that would detract from their missionary ministry. I would like to pay tribute to Ian Watson, Archdeacon of Coventry, for his selfless willingness to serve the Diocese as its only Archdeacon or as one of two. His own imagination and flexibility – even from his hospital bed – are an inspirational gift to the Church.

¹³ An issue that may affect future configurations of the Diocesan leadership is the work of the Dioceses Commission particularly, and its views over the future of Suffragan Sees when they become vacant. This, and other eventualities, will affect the outworking of the intention to operate with only one Archdeacon after the transitional period.

Once the fine details of this post have been fixed, I will then move on to configure the post previously occupied by Roger Morris so that this post can most fully complement other posts and fit with the evolving shape of the Diocese.

It is important to remind ourselves that the point of all of this is to further the *release of the missionary energies of the Diocese*. In the terms of the Glenfall Statement, it is to work with the grain of the Church in which 'the vision and motivation for mission and ministry should spring from and be resourced by local communities of faith'. The ministry of Bishops, Archdeacons, Diocesan Directors and Officers is to nurture and nourish this local life of the kingdom of God.

Some other structural matters

Moving in this direction will require:

1. a clearer linkage between the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and the leadership of the Deaneries;
2. a fuller involvement in Bishop's Staff by Rural / Area Deans;
3. a greater sense of the Directors serving the Deaneries to enable their mission in its varied forms to be most fully supported, including being most fully informed by the national perspectives that the Directors are able to bring to Diocesan life.

There are some other structural matters that I am aware need attention, among them:

1. better integration of our Directors into the structures of the Diocese;

2. more efficient use of Bishop's Staff Meeting so that it is freed to operate more strategically, and Archdeacons and the Diocesan Secretary are liberated for a fuller exercise of their ministries.¹⁴

Matters of Ministry

There is much to say here, but I will try to be brief.

1. Bishop John is reviewing the unquestionably important matter of the pastoral care of the clergy of the Diocese. Please feel free to contact him if you have views to feed in.
2. I have always been supportive of OLM ministry. I am glad that we have such a ministry in the Diocese. I am also glad that a review of our OLM training in collaboration with The Queen's Foundation will be taking place in October. It is important that we combine the highest standards with the most appropriate form of training for this locally based ministry. Please contact Roger Spiller if you have views to feed in.
3. I have also always been committed to lay ministry and to the sharing of leadership by a clearly designated team leader. I have been impressed with the quality of our Ministry Leadership Teams in various parts of the Diocese and I rejoice in the considerable contribution to our ministry by our Readers. I would also like to record my deep appreciation to the Church Wardens of the Diocese for their commitment to the life of the Church, and to express my thanks to them for their welcome during my Deanery visits.
4. I hope that MLTs, as *a tool of ministry and mission*, will be more fully used in the Diocese. I suspect that we need to put some more energy into the development of MLTs both where they are already in place and where their introduction would be of real benefit to parishes and benefices. I am grateful to Paul

¹⁴ In both of these areas it will be important to draw on the wisdom of the 2006 Review of Forums and DBE chaired by Peter Purdom.

Wignall for the review of MLTs that he conducted shortly before joining the Diocese (which can be found on the Diocesan web-site) and for his recommendations for its future.

5. I am excited by the success of the Bishop's Certificate and its potential for the teaching of the faith and the growing of ministry in the Diocese.
6. I am impressed with work of Chaplains in the Diocese and conscious of the way the recession has proved the worth of committed institutional involvement in the workplace.
7. I recognize that there is some understandable frustration when parochial appointments take a while to fill. Finding the right person for the post and navigating both the requirements of good practice and the legal processes of the Church of England takes time. However, I am very keen that we progress parochial appointments as expeditiously as possible.
8. I am conscious that in 2010 the Church of England will have more non-stipendiary and active retired clergy than stipendiary clergy. Much of our strategic planning will be influenced by this reality.
9. As a sign of our debt to and respect for those who serve the Church without drawing a stipend, it would be very good to find the most agreeable nomenclature of ministry. Would non-stipendiary ministers prefer to be known as self-supporting ministers or is there some other better title? Furthermore, in the light of the recent Readers' Upbeat Report, what is the preferred term for Reader Ministry? These are areas for the Department of Ministry to advise after proper consultation.
10. Related to the above, an area that concerns me is our reliance in many parts of the Diocese on House for Duty posts. It is an excellent arrangement providing that we can find people to fill the posts. This will need to be monitored in order to ensure that our policy is sustainable in the long term.

11. I am conscious that many Clergy and Church Wardens feel frustrated with the amount of time, energy and money that is taken up by maintaining and developing our buildings. There is no doubt our buildings are sapping much of our life. At the same time, in most cases, they are extraordinary assets that provide us with great opportunities. I have two more specific comments to make.
- a. The more efficient and transparent our Diocesan Advisory Committee is, the better it is for Clergy morale and for our mission. I am hopeful that a combination of a (relatively) new Secretary and new Chair (who is ordained), together with a new Chancellor, will serve us well in the coming years.
 - b. I have been encouraged by the recent Government Report *Churches and Faith Buildings: Realising the Potential* which recognizes ‘the wealth of [the Church of England’s] unrivalled stock of buildings and its local congregations in almost every place through the parish system’. I sense that there is an opportunity for a new settlement between Church and Government in which our contribution to local communities through our buildings can be better supported through statutory funding. Much will depend on whether we can translate this national Government interest into regional and local support.¹⁵

¹⁵ For more information, see:

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr3509.html>.

Mutuality

Much of what I have said so far concerns our *apostolicity*, our being sent by Christ in the Spirit as his people to proclaim God's kingdom in the world. What I want to say in this section has more to do with our *catholicity*, our connectedness to each other and the wider Church. One of the most important ways in which we maintain our connectedness is through good communication. Good communication leads to good communion. Indeed, communication is communion. So how do we improve our connectivity? I suggest the following as a start.

1. *By making use of opportunities for communication between Bishops and Clergy / Licensed Ministers.* Hence:
 - a. I plan to continue the practice that I have begun of occasional pastoral letters to Clergy and Licensed Ministers.
 - b. I would like to develop the following pattern of annual events:¹⁶
 - Autumn Study Day for Clergy (as now, around November)
 - Renewal of Ministerial Vows at the Chrism Eucharist in Holy Week (with lunch!)
 - An additional Spring / Summer training event for all Clergy and Licensed Ministers (in 2010 this will be the College of Preachers Event referred to earlier)
 - c. Bishop John and I seek to attend Chapter meetings on at least a three-year cycle.

¹⁶ On the theme of training events, this is a good opportunity to note that Coventry is one of the 15 UK venues chosen for the Willow Creek Global Leadership Summit (October 16-17 2009). I am told that speakers will include Bill Hybels and Bono!

2. *By a better communication of Diocesan Policies and Practice through some form of Diocesan Handbook as is found in many other Dioceses.*
3. *By sharing stories of good news around the Diocese and with our local communities.* There is so much good work happening around the Diocese which only travelling Bishops and Archdeacons hear about. I would like us to find ways of sharing the wonderful stories of God at work among us.
4. *Making the most efficient use of the IT in facilitating our communication and fostering our sense of being part of the same family.* I suspect that the potential of a Diocesan web-site is not being fully used and no doubt there are many other possibilities.

There are deeper issues of communication that lie at the heart of our common life. They concern how we live with difference and, especially in our times, how we handle the differences of view over the propriety of the ordination of women to the presbyterate and the episcopate. As well as being charged with 'releasing the missionary energies of the Diocese', I have also been charged with 'supporting and encouraging the strong bonds of mutuality that exist [for] this is a precious gift to cherish'. It is, indeed, a precious gift but it is a fragile one that is easily broken. It will require very careful handling over the weeks and years ahead. We will need to show a determination to understand the other person's view and a 'commitment to maintain constant love for one another' (1 Peter 4.8).

For my own part, it is incumbent on me to ensure that my own view – that the ordination of women is consonant with Scripture and consistent with the identity of the Church of England - is combined with a commitment to maintain the highest degree of communion possible with those who take a different view.¹⁷

¹⁷ For other comments on the same subject see my first Presidential Address to the Diocesan Synod (November 2008) on the web-site.

‘The Ministry of Reconciliation’

One of the reasons for ‘the strong bonds of mutuality that exist’ has been our Cathedral’s story of reconciliation which historically has influenced the character of the Diocese over the years. I have been surprised in my travels by how little the theme of reconciliation has been explicitly raised, apart from in our Schools. It is certainly how the Diocese is known throughout the Anglican Communion but is it how we understand ourselves?

Much of the focus of the Cathedral’s post-war reconciliation work was in the international sphere. Much great work has been done and is continuing today. But Canon David Porter, the Canon for Reconciliation, is also concentrating some of his team’s attention on the Diocese and on opportunities for exercising the ministry of reconciliation on home ground.

Certainly my prayer for the Diocese is that the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us (2 Corinthians 5.19) will be lived out not only over different views about the order of the Church but in every aspect of our common life – in our worship of God, in our making of new disciples and in our transformation of communities. And my longing for us all is that we will make known in every corner of the Diocese of Coventry that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Corinthians 5.19).

Of course we are to do this every day and every year but I am very much looking forward to the Jubilee Anniversary of the consecration of the new Cathedral in 2012. Fifty years ago the Diocese heard the Spirit say that, even more than a consecrated building, God would love to have a consecrated people.¹⁸ A renewal in the Spirit, a deepened level of fellowship and a new missionary endeavour followed. As the 50th Anniversary of the consecration of the Mother Church of the Diocese approaches – in Britain’s Olympian year - let us keep our ears open to whatever the Spirit will say to the Church in our day.

¹⁸ A story that is movingly told by Stephen Verney in his *Fire in Coventry* to be reprinted for the Jubilee celebrations, and in Brian’s Frost biography of Marjorie Milne, a remarkable woman who arrived in the city of Coventry in 1958 believing that God had sent her to the city to wait in prayer because he was about to do a new work (see Brian Frost, *Glastonbury Journey*).

And finally - or rather - primarily . . .

I conclude by saying that my first seven months in the Diocese have given me a renewed conviction in the role of prayer as a means by which the sovereign God graciously chooses to implement his will. So let us join in the Diocesan Prayer:

Father,
pour out your Spirit upon us,
and grant us a new vision of your glory,
a new experience of your power,
a new faithfulness to your word,
and a new consecration to your service,
that your love may grow among us,
and your kingdom come;
through Christ our Lord.