



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST  
**DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF**

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### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

So how are we doing? When I say “we” I mean the parishes, chaplaincies, and ministries that together make the diocese, and I mean the diocese that gives shape, coherence, and identity to the ministries, chaplaincies, and parishes.

Three years ago at synod I set out five priorities, as I saw them. I, and I know some others, have used them from time to time as a checklist on progress. When I set them out I also had in mind a list developed some while previously for the whole Anglican Communion. It’s known as the Five Marks of Mission. With both sets of five in mind I now reflect on how I think we’re doing.

My first priority was about our *presence and witness*: I said it shouldn’t just be maintained but enhanced. Our buildings and compounds are a visible token of commitment to that priority. I think of one location where a wholly new site has been developed, with a fine church and adjoining halls and chapels in attractive grounds in an area where no churches were before. I think of another where an existing, much used facility has been transformed by a huge extension. In a neighbouring country I recently co-dedicated an ambitious brand-new sanctuary squeezed on to an already busy compound. Elsewhere I’ve watched the unfolding of a programme of systematic new development, redevelopment, and refurbishment of a loved but tired collection of buildings, which will culminate in the reordering of the main place of worship itself. I’ve seen a small historic church, regularly bursting at the seams with worshippers, carefully craft additional space for worship while respecting the integrity of the building. I’ve consecrated an extraordinarily impressive principal sanctuary in the midst of an entire Anglican Centre that, like several of our set-ups, services not only Anglican church life but that of other Christian groups that seek safe space. I’ve rejoiced at the addition, in one remarkable compound, of a two-storey building housing not only a community hall and residential accommodation but also an early-years facility that is on the way to becoming an all-through primary school. These are only some examples. Necessarily, all these projects have been funded entirely or mainly within the nation they serve, though by a variety of means. So I pay tribute to all who have been involved and used their imagination and their skill.

Presence and witness, however, aren’t only about buildings. I think of two adjacent congregations, meeting in rented property, that have been rethinking their presence and mission and taking seriously the society that surrounds them, and of another that, with no assured home definitely of its own, majors on work with students and young adults but yearns also to be a blessing to other groups and sorts of people. I think of a parish that has faithfully fostered and encouraged a new and increasingly confident congregation using a public facility in an outlying area, and another that has recruited a priest especially to pastor and develop a worshipping community at the other end of its Emirate that is now large enough to warrant planning its own premises. In certain places, after

careful thought, Anglican worship in languages other than English has been started or supported: in Tamil, Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin Chinese, with the possibility of more.

Nor is the enhancement of presence and witness confined to parochial life or the life of particular parishes. A diocesan coordinator of spirituality has been appointed to work alongside the retreats facilitator, while also leading a church and congregation. The work of the Mission to Seafarers, which seems to me to go from strength to strength in our diocese, has been blessed by high-quality appointments and committed volunteers as well as staff. Diocesan administration, very lean by almost any comparison, seeks to reshape and enhance itself to serve better.

All this, happening in many parts of the Gulf and Cyprus, is cause for thankfulness. One challenge, I believe, beyond keeping up the momentum, is to remember why we are doing what we are doing. We're not in the building or property development industry. We're not in the rental business and we're not in the heritage business. We're not even in the charitable association business, let alone in the business of running quasi-companies and glorying in quasi-Boards. We're in and of the Kingdom of God. All we do is in order to go tell everyone the news that the Kingdom of God has come. That's why I said and say that our presence and witness should be not only maintained but enhanced. Another challenge is to remember that we are not the only Christian Church or tradition in either the Gulf or Cyprus. Getting to know and working thoughtfully with sensible ecumenical partners in celebrating Christian presence and developing Christian witness need be no burden but a great encouragement. I am pleased that a Gulf Church Leaders Fellowship has recently been established, not as an ecumenical bureaucracy but as an organising of solidarity.

In all I judge that very much has been achieved in maintaining and enhancing our presence and witness and at the same time that so much more potentially lies before us.

The second priority was *strong ministry*: appropriate strong ministry for service, leadership, and development. I shan't expatiate unduly, since this year's synod is to focus on precisely that and Canon Robert Jones will lead and guide our reflection. I do however want to stress three points at this stage.

First, attention must always be paid to developing a congregation's sense of corporate ministry, even while we consciously seek to appoint excellent public ministers who are particularly accountable: good deacons, good priests, good Readers, even (if you can imagine such a thing) good bishops. Our public ministers mustn't be, or even set out to be, solo heroes or Lone Rangers. They – we – need to invite, and be skilled at, team working. That team working must be with all others in local public ministry, with those of the laity carrying named responsibilities, and with the People of God as a whole in any one place or parish. But at the same time congregations and councils must acknowledge, respect, and cooperate with the task of principal communal leadership that is given (and given, in the first instance and under God, by me as bishop in the name of the whole diocese) to those ordained and licensed. If that leadership is going to be described as spiritual, it must be remembered that the spiritual is not opposed to the practical or the managerial or the administrative or the mundane. It encompasses it. This only underlines the need for collaborative, cooperative, unthreatened ministry, both by the clergy and by the laity. A local church isn't the clergy and ministers on the one hand and the people (or congregation, or council) on the other. A local church is the People of God, in which laity and clergy are inextricably bound in Kingdom service for the glory of God. Three years ago I set out a definition of the normative Anglican model of church life, to which I am absolutely committed: people and priests together, within the unity of a diocese, under its bishop's oversight an authority; neither clerical autocracy nor congregational autonomy. As long as I am bishop of this diocese I shan't deviate from that conviction.

My second point is that, in Cyprus and the Gulf, we have long been the beneficiaries of vocations, callings, ministers, and ministries that have been discerned, fostered, authorised, and largely paid for elsewhere. I believe that as a diocese we ought to deem that we are now mature enough, and that we should be responsible enough, to make a modest start – or rather in fact, having made a modest start, to continue with it modestly but firmly – on our own processes of encouragement, discernment, and selection for ordained and Reader ministries. Though some who will have been encouraged and selected and either ordained or admitted to ministry in this diocese will at some stage go on to minister elsewhere in the world, first I observe that we have long been blessed by precisely that in reverse, and secondly I believe our duty is to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, and to individuals and leaders within it, here and now. To have helped nurture a stock of ministers who will have had experience of our unique region and unique diocese with its particular challenges and opportunities will be to have benefitted both ourselves and the World Church.

My final point in considering ministry is that all of us need to be committed to learning and exploration in the Faith. Sterling beginnings have been made in promoting such a culture of continuing discovery and discipleship. I think it could and should be the seedbed in which not only vocations but also deeper and more harmonious congregational life can grow.

How, therefore, do I think that ministry has fared in the diocese in the last three years? Some excellent appointments of pastors and priests have, by God's grace, been made, and in certain places progress has been made on clarifying a right and better relationship between ministers and the rest of God's people. A determined venture in faith has been launched to encourage vocations on a surer and fairer footing. And in not a few places individuals and groups have responded to opportunities for broader and more profound Christian learning and equipping as disciples. The challenge to the diocese, I believe, is to spread understanding of and commitment to best practice in ministry, in vocation, and in discipleship.

The next priority I listed three years ago was *creating a stronger support base*. I had in mind the diocese as diocese, and I talked not only of money, vital though that is, but of intelligent interest and of prayer. Parishes and chaplaincies, I know, face this issue all the time, and fare variously. For the diocese, the issue has proved particularly hard to address. The Endowment Fund is now the Cyprus and the Gulf Foundation. Those representing it at this synod will speak more eloquently, but I record once again that historically it is the legacy of high hopes that were not fulfilled because of circumstances entirely beyond its control: a major attempt was made to get significant donors, well-wishers, and friends, both individual and corporate, to come together to create a significant sum to endow key aspects of the diocese, but at almost exactly the same time the First Gulf War broke out, and confidence in contributing was severely dented. In the event the modest capital that was garnered has been carefully husbanded, even in depressed times for interest-bearing investments, and the Foundation's independent trustees hold themselves ready to do the right thing for the mission of the diocese as a whole. But available sums are limited. A continuing question is whether and how to make another attempt at diocesan endowment.

I alluded when I discussed this priority to the restrictions on strategic planning that result from our having as a diocese no comprehensive system of share or quota from parishes and chaplaincies, such as would for example allow central remuneration of paid clergy and central development of mission projects. That lack is partly because no one worked it through to a conclusion earlier in the life of the diocese. Today it is also because of extremely tight restrictions on the movement and even the raising of money from Christian congregations and from their local transactions. I pay tribute to those parishes and congregations that have both remunerated their clergy and have developed premises and projects fairly, imaginatively, and with determination, but I still record what feels to me in aggregate to be a weakness not so much in support for the central diocese as in considered and pondered support by the diocese for parishes.

As for what I described three years ago as the desired task of telling our story as Cyprus and the Gulf and inviting others into it, I record that several people to my knowledge have spent time and effort trying to do just those things wherever they can, either locally in their countries of residence or internationally when they travel; that the hugely enhanced website and the work of those with a concern for communication have been a boon; and that my own ministry involves much of this in both expected and unexpected places. Co-workers in this field of communicating, explaining, and enthusing are always welcome.

I urged work on *serious encounter with Islam*. Certain examples that now exist around the diocese and in our region are encouraging and sometimes humbling. In places much depends on the aptitude, courage, and contacts of key clergy, but I do long for more widespread sharing of opportunities for encounter, dialogue, and study with the laity. I have to say that I sometimes find more untrue or half-true stereotypes and assumptions about Islam among our faithful congregations than I do when I am in lands with few or almost no Muslims. Since most of us live and are spending not a few years in or near the heartlands of Islam, that is a shame and a missed opportunity to say the least. I believe that I and others in the diocese now have a challenge before us. We must now set our minds to work on this area and, using appropriate and suitable resources, help equip one another across Cyprus and the Gulf.

The last priority I articulated three years ago was to do with **evangelism** and how we might understand it in our context. Some think that evangelism must go entirely on hold in Muslim-majority nations, and even in Cyprus too, where one Christian tradition is widely observed and feels dominant. I said that I believed we should realise that our presence and church life can be genuinely evangelistic, exactly where we are in every single country of this diocese without exception. My conviction remains the same. I repeat that we should understand ourselves always to be participating in the mission of God and that that should give us great confidence. The key, or perhaps I should say the preliminary necessity, is to be genuinely outward-looking and to notice God's opportunities. With regard to Muslims, the opportunity for the most effective evangelism that God is giving us consists largely in our integrity as people and as believers in the one God, in the way in which we conduct ourselves and are known to conduct ourselves, and in our participation in works of charity, compassion, mercy, and service. Examples of such specific works are many, though not uniform, across the parishes and chaplaincies of the diocese. But in all our nations there are large numbers of non-Muslims, some Christian by background and even, in not a few cases, by experience, but others too who have no notion of who or how Christians really are and why we follow our faith. Showing and sharing are rarely easy, not least to those who are our often our literal neighbours. To be evangelistic, however (and certainly to be evangelical), is to believe that the News is good. In words and deeds, a great task and almost limitless opportunities lie before all of us. Once again, I and others have a responsibility to be more active in promoting and encouraging the sharing of faith and practice, but in this field the key workers will not be the clergy alone but all faithful worshippers, churchgoers, and disciples of Christ. Evangelism is a remarkably democratic privilege and call. I link evangelism, and our appetite for it, with my earlier plea for refreshing exploration of the Christian faith as disciples.

At the start I said that for a long while now the Anglican Communion has commended *Five Marks of Mission* as a checklist for healthy church life.

The first is to *proclaim the good news of the Kingdom*. I've already urged that unless we understand ourselves to be heralds and inhabitants of the Kingdom of God with news about humanity and the world and life and death and hope that is genuinely good because it is deep, feeding, enriching, enlightening, and true, then our labour, and our councils and committees and charities and even our worship, will be in vain. So it will. But I know two things. First, in so many parts of our diocese that core identity and commitment to all that flows from it is remarkably strong. May it be so everywhere and with all of us. Secondly, every act of worship and supremely every

entering into the offering of the holy eucharist is the primary proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom: God in Christ proclaims it to us when we worship and adore, when we re-present and call to mind. Our going out, and our telling and our living of the Kingdom, is a response in love to that. The challenge is to remember that it's not a meritorious good work so much as a wonderfully inevitable reflecting of grace.

The second is to ***teach, baptise, and nurture new believers***. Whether I am hearing of baptisms, or celebrating confirmation, or reading of and sometimes taking part in deeply thoughtful and welcoming groups for enquirers, I know that in our diocese the passing on of faith is almost everywhere taken seriously and done joyfully. The challenge is to make the welcome of new believers and new worshippers genuine and their continued sustenance real.

The third is to ***respond to human need by loving service***. All of us know conspicuous examples of such loving service, both in communal projects and in personal attitudes, sacrifices, and acts of generosity. In Cyprus and the Gulf I know of really thoughtful responses to situations of poverty, disadvantage, and injustice, both of long standing and newly arisen. The challenge is to spread news among ourselves and across the diocese of what is done, not for self-congratulation but to encourage and inspire. I believe we also need to use our common resolve and appropriate resources wisely gathered to support and develop significant instances of service and self-giving that are among our most telling witnesses of Christian love. It would be impossible here not to mention the ministry of Christ Church Aden in the Yemen, one of the most troubled of Arabian nations, a ministry that makes an incalculable impression on Muslims of good will in that land and elsewhere.

The fourth Mark of Mission is to ***seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation***. In the lands we serve and live in there is much injustice, more than a little violence, and a clear need for peace and reconciliation. You will at once be able to think of people and projects, some more public and some more hidden, that serve the cause of justice, confront violence, and promote reconciling peace. In some locations and societies in our region it is easier than in others to know how precisely to live by all aspects of this Mark of Mission; nevertheless I know of many instances of commitment to it and action on it. Yet it needs to be said that this Mark of Mission will ring hollow if its aspiration and counsel is not reflected and indeed modelled in church life. In some places I observe a great need for peace and reconciliation in our own Christian settings and sadly I know of some injustices, perhaps even sometimes forms of violence. Sobering but refreshingly direct words of St Augustine about the Church come to mind: "there are many sheep outside and many wolves inside." We shall witness most truly to the world when we have let the God of peace and justice transform our lives first.

The last Mark is to ***strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and renew the life of the earth***. Some people who inhabit the lands we live in struggle for resources. Others live, for the most part, superabundantly. For Christians, though nations have a significance, our truest citizenship and identity is as sons and daughters of God and inhabitants of the Kingdom. The earth, the world, is not ours to dispose of as we will. It is the Creation, loved into being and sustained in love by the Creator. There are surprisingly many who, with or without explicit religious faith or adherence, sense that. Our task is to make common cause, for God's glory.

So, how are we doing? In the end, although it is legitimate to examine and ponder, we are not to be our own judges. Here we should, I believe, sit under scripture, which is a primary record and a spelling out of the gospel of the Word himself. With the writer to the Hebrews we are to recognise that, *seeing we are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, we must lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets us, and run with patience the race that is set before, looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith* (Hb12:1-2a). Life in the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf is sometimes extraordinarily challenging but for myself immeasurably rewarding. Anyway, it's where God's put us. Let's rejoice in it.