

This the fourth Visitation and Gathering Service that we have held, but this year there has been such a change in personnel that I think I owe it to you to say why the service is held and what it hopes to achieve. I don't think I can do better in that description than quote what I said in 2011, at the beginning of this sequence.

“Both the term Visitation and what it signifies hark back to the times, in the UK particularly, when the archdeacon used to ride around the parishes on his horse once a year to find out what was going on and to bring news of the wider church to people who had no other means of hearing about it. As it has developed, it has become a means of exercising both oversight and accountability. In the UK, churches fill in lengthy forms describing every aspect of church life, and then there are services like this one at which the movers and shakers in the church hear the archdeacon's charge which is the same process in reverse – a means of answering the questions the archdeacon hopes the parishes might be asking about the wider church and diocese. In its most modern forms the administration is kept to a minimum and the visitation service is an opportunity to meet with and talk to the people who actually make church happen on the ground, especially to thank them for all that they do, to update them on what's happening in the diocese, to set out a context for their local work and a vision for their future commitment, and all within the setting of a service of worship in which the work of the church can be described and celebrated.”

Since that time I believe we have discovered afresh the diversity of church life on the island, and the value of gathering together to both symbolise and celebrate it. We have done our symbolizing in various ways. We have used the symbol of light, and last year, the symbol of living stones. This year we are thinking about growth and so each parish has brought a bag of soil – and those soils vary considerably across the island –to mix together in a pot in which a flower is planted. This is a simple symbol, reminding us of what, in our better moments, we all know and subscribe to, that the flower of the Gospel blooms although, or perhaps when, planted in and sustained by many different contexts and soils. We have continued that theme of growth into our Gospel reading which reminds us that very small seeds when nurtured properly can grow into very large trees, and that when the stuff that makes for growth is mixed thoroughly throughout the bread dough, it rises and grows wonderfully into something nourishing. And all of that points to what I consider to be the theme of the moment for us in the Archdeaconry and Diocese, and which is named in our first reading – our Common Life. That is what we celebrate today, and the implications of that celebration are essentially what I want us to take away.

But first, let me welcome some of our clergy who are here for the first time. They include Nic and Julia Denny-Dimitriou, and Andrew and Rosemary Symonds from Paphos. Paul and Sarah Maybury just missed last year's service and they are here from Deryneia. Wendy Hough was licensed just before Easter, making history as the first female Parish Priest in the diocese. Most recently, Harry Ching, our new student lay chaplain from Famagusta arrived from Hong Kong. We are also pleased to welcome Canon Pat Mossop who is enjoying a period of interim ministry in Christ Church Agia Napa. And welcome also to Peter King, the new Chaplain at Dekelia. And my thanks to Brian Elliott, interim minister here at the cathedral, for officiating today, and to the wardens and Council for their readiness and enthusiasm to be part of this occasion. Next year we hope to be able to welcome other new priests to be part of this talented and unique group of ministers. Welcome also to those non clergy in the congregation who are

also here for the first time. This an occasion to thank everyone for the part they play in the overall life of the church on this island, and those thanks are heartfelt.

On this island we are proud to be successors to, and inheritors of, the traditions of St Paul. And as our reading from Romans reminds us, it is Paul who makes most of this theme of our common life, in the NT. We know of his contribution through his letters to individual churches with all their particularity and individual character, but we see also that Paul wants to draw those churches together into something that could actually and remarkably be described as the body of Christ, and that he does that in two ways. First, through words: by his teaching, his instruction, his direction about how churches should organise their ministry and worship. But also by action: by his big project, the Collection. And, I suppose, you could say, by his own person: by the visits he makes and the way he makes himself available as a one stop shop for advice and help.

OUR COMMON LIFE - what does that term mean to us I wonder? At one level it's about celebrating our individuality, as we have been today – sharing our diversity and in a sense then sharing our difference, but recognising it, and recognising along the way that the Gospel thrives in many soils. But that can still be a long way from recognising a common life. That term, like The Body of Christ, only really makes sense when we recognise our *interdependence*: when we see that without other parts of the Body, we are diminished; when we realise our special capacity to make the Body function *as* a Body, and when we start to see ourselves and our place and our fellowship and our worship and our service as part of a much bigger picture, a small pebble in a mosaic – and when that bigger picture is the one that inspires us and prompts our actions. And that I think is what Paul is working towards. He has no interest in power. He is not an empire builder. He has no grand place for himself. In his generally self-deprecating way he commends his vision of the body, and extends that to the whole of our faith. It is the body of Christ that as St Teresa of Avila said is Christ's body on earth to continue his work. It is Christ's risen body that is the precursor of our risen body. Christ's broken body is the bread that we share, and being part of the body gives each one of us our identity.

And so, the greater part of Paul's writing is about what brings us together and gives us a common stamp. Remember the people of Corinth never met the people of Rome. The people of Thessaloniki felt little in common with the people of Galatia. And that is what excites Paul about his Collection project. He wants to finance aid distribution in Jerusalem. Churches in Rome, Galatia and Corinth have all signalled some interest. As we read in 2 Corinthians, this is a project that at the time of writing is gaining momentum. Other smaller churches in places like Phillippi are anxious to become involved and make their contribution because they want to be a part of the Church's wider mission.

On our island, and within our diocese, and within our province there are so many practical examples of how we can celebrate our unity. We are luckier than Paul – we have a structure in place that is built on the premise of 'better together' – the diocese, and within that the archdeaconry.

One long standing concrete example of working together is the Trustees. This year we have a new Trustee, Julia Lewis, to complete the small team that I chair. Sometimes I look at our agendas, trying to rekindle the will the live that initial sight had extinguished, thinking, can these bones live? But actually

what the Trustees are about is providing a context for our ministry and worship. It is about providing us with churches and vicarages, and the aspiration of the Trustees is to work for a time when every parish has a church and a vicarage provided. Until then we have to compensate as best we can with financial help to some parishes.

All of this is alongside the work of caring for what we do own. This year we have made a financial saving by relinquishing the role of Retained Inspector. Partly because of that we need your cooperation in a new way. I want fabric Committees or Wardens –whoever is the most appropriate, to make a six monthly report to the Trustees on the state of the buildings they use, whether rented or owned. And saying that reminds me that I have had more enquiries this year than ever, about the role of wardens. What are they for, and what should we expect of them? There is now a succinct summary of the role of wardens on the website, and that is there not just for the benefit of wardens but for all who are interested in the governance of our church and the role of lay people in that. I hope it might be downloaded and discussed by Councils more generally.

Among the things we shall be thinking about during the coming year, ministerial formation, discernment and training gives us one opportunity to become more involved with each other. We are hoping to arrange a Vocations day in Paphos in the Spring, as part of a festival of ministry, and we shall all be able to have a part in that. We are appointing more Vocations advisers, and I hope we shall continue to appoint clergy who are able to make specific contributions. With ordinands in training we have new opportunities for cross fertilisation through placements. I would love to see more Church Learning Groups formed and operational, to complement the one in Limassol. We have a much better structure for them now, than when the idea was first trialled some years ago.

We have opportunity to cooperate also in the business of communication. Julia D-D, a professional journalist, will be coordinating our news gathering activity on the island. Knowing what is happening in other parts of the church was always a function of NT letter writing, and we want to continue that Pauline tradition too. We have to believe that others will be interested in what we do, and that interest will begin with our own interest in what others do. It is very easy to talk down or dismiss what we do from day to day in our churches. Some years ago I was responsible for a religious magazine programme on UK TV, and at the beginning of each series I would ring round people I expected to be full of news items, and I would ask them, what's going on in your neck of the woods? You would be amazed at the number whose reply was along the lines of 'not very much.' If we are not enthused by what we do, how can we expect others to be – and looking for the good news stories in our midst is a good start in the process of reflecting on our own priorities. If we do nothing that's of interest to anyone else, what does that say about us? Our aspirations to do something together on youth work also have had a boost with the appointment of Harry Ching, a former youth officer at St John's Cathedral Hong Kong, to Famagusta Student Chaplaincy;

It will be good to explore with the congregation here in Nicosia, and with a new priest when appointed, how the cathedral can embrace its diocesan role most fully. Cathedrals are traditionally symbols of unity, sources of shared creativity, places of hospitality for all. May this be a home we can all feel part of.

Spirituality has developed substantially since we have been able to appoint a Spirituality Coordinator (Paul Maybury), to work alongside Maggi LeRoy whose work in this field has been so appreciated. He has already brought verve, energy, vision and purpose to this area of work, throughout the island, and indeed further afield. His appointment is a good example of how the diocese can add value to our individual ministries and mission, when we do something together. Paul is just one of the people who work from the diocesan office – all of us committed to serving this diverse church. This year we have been able to welcome someone else working on behalf of all of us – Evangelia Georgakaki, our new Finance Officer. She joins a committed and dedicated team to whom we all know we owe much.

I had hoped today to say something about the situation in Eastern Cyprus and the opportunities it opens up. On the face of it, the vacancies in Famagusta and Agia Napa have given opportunity to devise a shared full time post between the two. There is a real need to build up a resident congregation in north east Cyprus to complement the thriving student one in Famagusta,

and that could be an exciting task for a new priest, in addition to carrying out fully the role of parish priest at Christ Church. You can see the vision: an opportunity to increase the 'stock' of congregations, an investment in the island's future, and an opportunity to model team working among clergy and ministers. The new lay student Chaplain, resident in Famagusta would complete that picture.

However, at present we only have finance to support the lay Chaplain for one year, and only sufficient money to make a part time appointment in Agia Napa. And that draws attention to a bigger problem. How do we put seed corn money into worthwhile projects at a time when the diocese is cash-strapped as a result largely of problems in the Gulf? And indeed, this is not just a problem concerning Famagusta or Eastern Cyprus. What happens if our money in each parish is suddenly insufficient to cover our needs? Who will bale us out? Since I have been here, three out of seven parishes have needed intervention to help. That has come from the diocese in the form of loans, largely. But what if that were to happen in the future? Where is the diocese to get the money from?

I am acutely aware that the parishes on the island are anxious about money. In the longer term I remain convinced that with first class clergy, strong lay leadership and realistic giving, we shall be able to overcome our present difficulties, but in the short term many people are looking for reassurance. Certainly one working together that we all accept that we need is a joint concentration on Stewardship. One exasperated Council member said to me recently: do you know, we don't deserve a priest! In that parish, in the previous week, the giving had amounted to 2.7 euros per person. What can you get for 2.7 euros? What proportion of our income is 2.7 euros? How does 2.7 euros a week compare with what we pay for other services in other parts of our lives? We need to grasp this, and to do so at a time when the church on the island will hardly ever have been better ministerially provisioned. Paul's letters are a mixture of inspiration and challenge. And so it is for us. But stewardship is only part of what needs to happen.

Our intention, our hope, our prayer is that we can as a tentative first step make a start with a kind of insurance Fund here based on pledges from parishes, that if and when needed, money can be loaned (loaned not even given) to the diocese for a three year period, in the first instance to help out our fellow

parishes in their need. I want to see every Council consider this proposal, which I think is win-win. The funds in question will have been dormant probably for years. The more that is pledged, the less each parish will actually contribute and the more security there is for all. The fund would be administered by the Community of Cyprus Treasurers so everyone has a say in how the money is spent. Further details will be available at the Forum Meeting, but I hope to be able to celebrate the launch of this Fund on Advent Sunday. Churches are not businesses. They will always be authentic when they operate on a hand to mouth basis actually. But in a world of contracts and obligations there needs to be a central fall-back, and that is what we want to provide. It's in our hands. And in addition to leadership and stewardship a third thing is necessary: a real desire and strategy for growth. I hope also that we might take this as an opportunity to reassess priorities, and make sure that mission and ministry is right at the top of the list.

Whether we take inspiration and hopefulness from the pictures of growth, of the mustard seed or the yeast in the dough; or whether we take our lead from the sense of privilege of being the body of Christ, the challenge is to each of us personally to be that energy for growth, to be that beacon of hopefulness, to be that medium in which the gospel can bloom, to be a active member of this communion.

Once again thank you all. I am aware that I am to a degree preaching to the converted, but I do so in order that you can in turn convert the rest. May God prosper you in the coming year in all that you attempt in his name.