

Report from Bishop Kevin to the Diocesan Synod, March 2013

As Elspeth isn't here I thought I would take the opportunity to tell you a story, which begins like any self respecting story:

Once upon a time – Once upon a time there was a Bishop of Argyll and The Isles who thought of himself as intelligent – enough, articulate – enough, young – enough, good looking – exceptionally. And so when that Bishop of Argyll and The Isles was ill, he decided to tell everyone he had the “flu”. Then somebody in the office pointed out that you don't normally have emergency surgery for the generic “flu” and so this Bishop of Argyll and The Isles learnt the truth of the maxim – Oh what a tangled web we weave when first the purpose to deceive.

Many of you now know that I spent the month of January, and most of February out of action and there are certain visits that could not be made and certain administrative duties which have had to be postponed but hopefully we are catching up.

One of the purposes of this report is to look back on the year and I would like to thank all those who serve on committees in our Diocese and who facilitate the ministry of our whole diocese. Among those I would like to thank especially, Ken Skipper who for so many years produced the Diocesan magazine and who has resigned. I would also like to record my thanks to the Diocesan officers and to the office staff, Sue and Audrey, who do much more than anyone sees or knows to facilitate the mission and ministry of the Diocese.

Not being an abstract thinker myself, I will give this report using the “three M” formula:

1. Mission, 2. Ministry, 3. Money

And so

1. Mission – Possible

One of the biggest difficulties in Building the Vision of God's Kingdom in the Diocese of Argyll and The Isles, one of the biggest difficulties is that many people believe 'mission' is impossible. Mission, I firmly believe, is an attitude of mind and if we really believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ makes himself known in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers, if we really believe that we can, need to, and do – meet God in worship, then the Holy Spirit works in and through us, whether we always recognise that fact or not. And the Holy Spirit works and is working now because now this moment, is all we truly possess and that is what we have to offer – the sacrament of the present moment.

We are the outward and visible sign of God's grace in our world.

For too long in Argyll and The isles the attitude seems to have been because we struggle financially, mission is impossible. This is patently not true because in travelling around the Diocese, I encounter small vibrant groups who want to know God. They want to encounter the living God, they want to show God's love and they

realise that in Our Lord Jesus Christ we may recognise all that God wants us to be all that God knows we can be.

When we realise that we can be the people God, and perhaps, only God knows we can be. Then the inner striving and temptations and journey, gives energy and enthusiasm to the life of the whole group and it shows itself in all sorts of different ways, all of which are Building the Vision of God's Kingdom making Mission Possible in Argyll and The Isles.

Over the next year, congregations will have the opportunity to look at their own Mission to make a plan, create a strategy not to preach on street corners but to show that we believe that God is with us. The numbers really don't matter. Over the year I can think of spending time with small congregations whose worship led into time together, led us to sharing what it is to love and be loved by God.

Plans, mission strategies, don't have to be elaborate, use the Elijah principle. Every Jewish family at Passover leaves one seat vacant for Elijah. Each congregation sets up a set of books every week, fresh, clean with an up-to-date news sheet, letter, gift and envelope.

It occurred to me at Christmas, we build cribs to show how, where and when Jesus was born, why not open our churches in the days after Christmas to encourage people to come in and look and see and light a candle as a sign of prayer, or a sign that we want to pray.

Open our churches in the midst of great debates in national life to allow people some space to think, pray, light a candle.

Mission possible in Argyll and The Isles and so to:

2. Ministry

There is a sense in which we talk too much about ministry and not enough about discipleship. About what it means to be a disciple of Our Lord Jesus Christ because that is what is most important whether we have a leadership ministry, an authorised ministry, an ordained ministry whatever – we remain disciples. And mission is possible when being a disciple of Jesus Christ is exciting, energising, we want to know, feel, experience more. These are the facets of life with God which are attractive, give energy, which can be harnessed.

We are an Episcopal Church, which means that through the Diocese and the threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, we are not a series of congregations fighting for survival but a coherent whole, a body working together to Build the Vision of God's Kingdom here in our Diocese.

From the point of view of ordained ministry and leadership, there have been two significant appointments in the past year. The Very Reverend Nicki McNelly as Provost of the Cathedral in Oban and The Very Reverend Andrew Swift as Dean of the Diocese. What these appointments emphasize is the corporate nature of our life expressed through our Eucharist in our Cathedral last night. The Dean taking his stall as a sign and a symbol of Diocesan consultation and co-operation.

Emphasised in the glorious celebration we had at the Cathedral on Cumbrae when Provost of Oban and Dean of the Diocese were literally installed at what is

geographically the other end of the Diocese. For these of us who have been ordained for many years we may say the Church is not the church we were ordained into. And then we say Thank God, thank God for the sacrament of the present moment. Now mission possible.

The ordained ministry facilitates the ministry of the whole church, sustaining the sacramental life, making real God's presence, seeking God through evangelical Truth and Apostolic Order. The stipendiary clergy regard themselves as one team working across the Diocese which is why Continuing Ministerial Development means for us meeting together as a group, last year twice. Meeting together for worship, study and the celebration of our common discipleship and life.

The vibrant lay leadership of many of our congregations draws on the energy and vision of the ordained and the energy and vision of the ordained draws on the lay leadership of all our congregations.

In sustaining the sacramental life of our Diocese tribute must be paid and thanks given to our retired clergy who help sustain Diocesan life. Thank you.

3. And so Mission Possible through Ministry and Money

The sacrament of the present moment, means now is the only moment we truly possess. That moment makes money the sacrament of seriousness. Remember St Luke says "where your treasure is there will your heart be also" Not where your heart is there will your treasure be.

The sacrament of seriousness, the outward and visible sign of our experience, our faith in God's grace.

Unfortunately the need for money is always in danger of defining the Church and our life together. Like the priest who arrived late at the airport for a busy homeflight and he was hurried on to the plane to find there was only one seat left right at the back of the plane. Everyone was belted up waiting for this little man all in black who got to his seat and couldn't find anywhere to put his hat. So the steward came and said to him "Father, I'll put your hat right above your head – sit down".

They were flying over the Alps one engine cut out, then the other, there was absolute mayhem and the steward shouted down the plane – father can't you do something religious. The priest grabbed his hat and took a collection.

Money is the sacrament of seriousness and Quota needs to increase not to pay off debts, not for foreign travel for a Bishop, but to help pay for the essential resources in people who will strengthen the ministry team lay and ordained to proclaim the gospel, the good news and to build the Kingdom of God in this Diocese.

One of the reasons for entertaining you all last night in the office was to show you how we are using our resources. The ground floor is the Diocesan and the Bishop's office, the upper floor is let out to create an income stream. The office is actually fully utilised and often with meetings going on we really are toiling.

Over the day we will hear of how and who and what the ordained Diocesan Ministry Team are working towards in Building the Vision of God's Kingdom in this Diocese and this Province.

We are not alone we are part of the whole and Argyll and The Isles has an important part to play in the Province and in the worldwide Anglican Communion. Think of the number of visitors we have to the Diocese, not only to Iona and to Cumbrae.

There are serious plans for an initiative to raise serious money outside the Diocese. We are working with individual charges and we may need to use historic resources to upgrade building and houses as Skye pointed out yesterday.

Big oaks from little acorns grow.

And there you have a good example of a small congregation who have experienced and experience ordained leadership which not only sustains but inspires. They are working on their meagre buildings because if you noticed in their presentation, mother and toddler groups, the local music society – it's outreach but in this context, to use the jargon, they are creating an income stream.

If we have faith that God is with us, if we really want to make God known through the sacramental life of our church then money is our sacrament of seriousness to make our whole life the sacrament of God's present moment.