

The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel is a film released in 2012, which initially I thought, was remarkable only for the fact that for once, Maggie Smith did not play an elderly Dowager Countess. Initially I watched the film and thought it was light and entertaining but trivial. Several months later wanting something light and entertaining, I watched the DVD again and I was struck by the mantra used by the young hero of the film. He is the classic sort of tall, dark, handsome man I used to see in my shaving mirror, howsoever.....Throughout his various adventures and vicissitudes his constant reflection is, “Everything will be alright in the end and if it is not alright it is not the end”.

Constantly in the office, as I lose the mobile phone signal on an island or by Loch Awe. Constantly I comfort myself with what I think would make a good strap line for our Diocese:

*Everything will be alright in the end and if it is not alright it is not the end – which gives me a very firm base from which to make my report to Synod.*

One of the purposes of this report is to look back at the year and I would like to begin by thanking all those who serve on committees in our Diocese and who facilitate the ministry of our whole Diocese. I would especially like to record my thanks to the Diocesan Officers and to the office staff, Sue and Audrey. We are richly blessed in our Diocesan Officers and staff who constantly remind me in word and deed that everything will be alright in the end and if it is not alright it is not the end.

That is indeed true of Mission, Ministry and Money in our Diocese. Reports can be very difficult to follow and so in an attempt at brevity and clarity I will answer three basic questions under the headings of Mission, Ministry and Money.

And the three questions are –

1. Where have we been?
2. Where are we now?
3. Where are we going?

#### In Mission:

Where have we been?

Mission is an attitude of mind which seeks to make God’s Kingdom real for the communities in which we find ourselves. Building the Vision of God’s Kingdom, for God’s Kingdom, in God’s Kingdom. And remember our mission is about Building the Vision because a Vision is realisable, a fantasy is not.

We began the Building process by each congregation identifying their own building blocks which make real God’s love in their place, their community, their own congregation. We went on in Year 2 to equip ourselves for our Mission in the Compass course basic Christian learning for discipleship, which is designed to help us all be more confident in sharing our faith. And notice I said is designed to help us, because the material is there and I

know one or two groups who are revisiting that material which is helping meet felt needs. In this past year we have been looking at how we share our faith through our own stories.

There is still a great deal of cynicism around – we've done it all before, Mission 21, MYCMi, Partners in Mission. At which point in the conversation I remind myself that the cynic is the person who is determined never to be disappointed again. These comments and conversations tend to develop in the same way, we are not getting any younger, no more people are coming to church, we have no more money.

Mission is an attitude of mind which finds the very idea, the very concept of God, exciting. So exciting that life with God becomes the motivating energy in our own lives, we search deep deep deep for the love that is of God. Remember the Todd River, flows whether it is visible or not. If we seek Holiness the very desire to be with God, then our spirituality becomes the conduit of God's love in our lives and that Truth communicates itself through energy and enthusiasm for the things that are of God.

That is what attracts people, that is what our communities are crying out for, that is what people are prepared to commit to financially.

If we put the money and the numbers first we will fail but if our worship and our prayer life is the conduit for God's life; which flows like the Todd River, most of the time unseen, then the rest will follow. That has always been my experience.

Where are we now?

Building the Vision this year will centre around our reflective practise in daily life, which brings us closer to God, because we are in for the long haul and we need to know the definite difference between Novelty and Spirituality. Everybody asks what it is that fills churches, is it publicity, is it music, is it electronic gadgetry. And everybody wants a gimmick, a novelty. Those things so quickly lose their attraction, even, especially, the Bishop. Entering the fourth year of the episcopate, reading between the lines in magazines or often there in black and white – the Bishop always. And I think, well, I don't actually but I get the message.

At my consecration the Dean of Windsor quoted Philip Larkin's poem on church going, which points out that those outside the church often recognise this church as a place of seriousness. There is a yearning in that poem which you can feel in many of our communities.

Our Scottish Episcopal Church in Argyll and The Isles can answer that yearning. The sacramental life of our church, our preaching, our respect for scripture. This is the conduit for the life giving water which Our Lord Jesus Christ promised to the spiritually thirsty. Remember the Todd River and remember our liturgy speaks of the things that are eternal that water the soul.

Where are we going?

Deep into God's life and things are not alright because it is not the end.

The reason we constantly reflect on where God is in our own lives, in the life of our congregation, our Diocese. The reason to reflect is we are in for the long haul and we are laying the foundations now for the vibrant life of our Diocese in 25 years time.

### And so to Ministry

– Where have we been?

Over the past years Argyll and The Isles has gained insights from ministry in many forms, lay and ordained. Non stipendiary ministry, post retiral ministry, local collaborative ministry. These insights are an essential part of Building the Vision of God's Kingdom here in Argyll and The Isles and make a massive contribution to the excitement of where we are now.

And where are we now?

The Diocese has two ordinands in training who will be ordained in 2015 and will serve non stipendiary curacies in the Diocese.

Shona Boardman left to return to Canada in January and Father Simon Mackenzie joined us in Mid Argyll. Mid Argyll is a very significant development in our Diocesan life not least because Father Simon has oversight of Arran and is drawing the whole area together.

Mid Argyll is also significant in that when advertised we had eight full serious applications, we short listed four people and of those four, three are now in the Province. Father Simon with us and two others in other Dioceses.

Father Adrian Fallows has announced he will retire next year and this is giving us the opportunity to begin working with the West Highland Region, not only to sustain congregational life but to build on Father Adrian's work in the future.

There are several people who have approached me, interested in God's call to ministry in our Diocese.

And so where are we going?

Into very exciting times. The Holy Spirit is active in Argyll and The Isles, there are times when I think she is working over time.

Lay leadership is obviously pivotal to our work as a Diocese and over the next couple of years we hope to build in real development training.

In a sense this begins this year on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June when we will have a Diocesan celebration of all lay ministry here in Oban. Dr Anne Tomlinson will preach.

### And so the Money –

The sacrament of seriousness. A sacrament the outward and visible sign of God's inward and spiritual grace.

Money the sacrament of our seriousness in wanting to know God and in wanting to make God's love known and so where have we been? –

Through very difficult times.

Diocesan Quota has increased significantly for many charges over the last couple of years but I'm assured by our Diocesan Treasurer and Finance Committee that increases will not be so great after 2015.

There is no room for complacency, we do not have limitless resources unfortunately and we are heavily dependent on Provincial funding.

But where are we now?

Moving significantly towards financial reality in many of our charges. That reality involves the recognition that we are part of a whole, which is our Diocese and our Province of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Remembering that money is the sacrament of seriousness then the recognition involves financial contribution but also Diocesan resources. And what I mean by that is we have had several situations over the past couple of years where there have been difficulties in quota payments or accounting problems. Many of these situations need not have arisen, certainly resolution would have been achieved earlier if the charges concerned had sought Diocesan advice and help earlier.

And where are we going? –

As I said earlier if our priorities are God centred then money is the sacrament of seriousness and finance will be less of an issue than it has been. It will never be easy but it must never be allowed to be the defining issue of our community life. And it will not be that defining issue if we genuinely seek God in all that we do and in all that we are.

We are working to lay the foundations for the future of the lives of all our charges. Significantly the work and mission of our Diocese has been remarked upon and commended in all our applications.

*The Rt Rev'd Kevin Pearson*

*Bishop of Argyll and The Isles*

*Report to Diocesan Synod March 2014*