

Bishop's Notes for his Charge to Churchwardens at the Archdeacon's Visitations May 2012

It's the 350th anniversary of the BCP, so it seemed right to hold this Visitation in the context of Evensong.

Archdeacons normally do the Visitation on behalf of the Bishop but as this is my first year I particularly wanted to do them myself.

c. 475 parishes in Salisbury Diocese so that's 950 Churchwardens. Thank you.

Add up the vast number of former Churchwardens and there is an astonishing army of experience and commitment in the C of E.

Churchwarden's tasks

1) Working with the incumbent, PCC and others.

i.e. team.

The work is likely to be agreeable but where there is no conflict there is no life.

Seek God's wisdom – hence the reading from the Book of Proverbs. Seek to make conflict creative and life-giving by doing it in the Spirit of Christ and under the Wisdom of God.

2) Ministry and Mission of the Church

As the new Bishop I have made 15/19 Deanery visits. I am trying to get to know the personality of the diocese. Some themes are emerging which are not mine but which I am picking up from the Diocese.

Growth in numbers and depth – deep church is attractive church; confident in the resources of the Christian traditions.

Outward facing church – a commitment to the local community and to the world God loves.

Children and young people at the heart of everything we do – see the Children and Young People's strategy. This is also a Diocese that has an age profile in which retired people are a significantly higher proportion than in the country as a whole. There are some very good models of engagement of people of all ages – e.g. Open the Book.

There are more clergy in the Diocese than 10 years ago but the patterns of ministry have changed. 216 stipendiary clergy, 217 retired clergy with Permission to Officiate. There are non-stipendiary Assistant Priests and a diversification of authorised lay ministry. E.g. 900 Lay Pastoral Assistants (600 of whom recently came to the cathedral for the LPA Day). We are beginning an experiment in 'energised lay ministry'. Ministry is the task of the whole Church.

Finance – Money is about ministry and mission. We may feel stretched but Salisbury is better placed than most dioceses. It has been well run and some difficult decisions were made. Nearly every parish pays its share in full. If you are having difficulty, please ask for help from the Chairman of the Board of Finance and the 'Group of 20'.

3) Buildings

87% of our church buildings are Grade I or II*. They are beautifully cared for, loved and prayed in. They are a big responsibility and can seem a burden, especially when the lead has been stolen for the third time. Clergy sometimes complain about being "Museum Keepers" and Churchwardens might feel the same. Our buildings are also our best shop windows and they are often the treasures and places of memory and focus in our community.

Small rural churches – don't feel you have to do everything. Do one thing really well. Deep church is attractive church.

The Diamond Jubilee

This is a remarkable year for our nation.

Recent royal visits to Dorset and Wiltshire.

“Big Thank You” – on diocesan website and paper copies in churches and schools between HMQ’s visits to Dorset and Wiltshire and the end of the Jubilee weekend.

And finally

We had Psalm 127 not 27 “Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost who build it.

Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

“By wisdom a house is built” (Proverbs 24.3)

“like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2.)

Like any act of service, the more you give the more you receive. I hope that being Churchwarden is a joy as well as a duty.

Thank you, and thank God to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.