

Diocesan Synod 1 March 2025 – Presidential Address

It's very good to come together for this Synod on St David's Day. Thank you all for giving up this time to come and take counsel together, especially anyone from Wales! Some of you will know the small town of St David's in southwest Wales. A small town with a great Cathedral, originally built in the 500's when David became a bishop. There are many stories about St David, or Dowi Sant. In one of them he was at a Synod, that gathering of church leaders and people that goes back over a thousand years. The crowd was so large no speaker could be heard, until David started to speak. A mound of earth was said to rise up under him, and a white dove appeared on his shoulder as every voice was hushed. I can't promise that today but we'll do what we can! Its interesting to read that Synod's have existed for over 1500 years in this land.

We will be hearing a little today about February's General Synod, when hundreds of delegates gathered from the 42 dioceses that make up the Church of England. There was great media interest on the day that safeguarding was discussed, with Channel Four,

and others outside the entrance looking for interviews. We are all determined to have the safest church that we can, where all people, young and old, the fragile and the strong can find a home and a secure place to form good relationships with God and each other, and to discover and share life-giving faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. There have been terrible reports in the national press over the last few months which have been distressing and depressing for us all, but especially for victims and survivors of abuse. Abuse for them is never something far away, or just 'historical', and national stories stir up many painful memories, as well as a desire for justice. General Synod was considering a detailed and complex piece of work aimed at bringing independent safeguarding to the Church of England.

After a long and good debate the Synod chose to bring in independent scrutiny of safeguarding practice, and make the national safeguarding team part of an independent body, while keeping our diocesan safeguarding teams embedded in dioceses as they are today, while considering further whether creating an

independent charity to run safeguarding in every diocese and parish would bring a safer church or not. It was in many ways a sensible decision, though it was widely reported as the Church of England keeping things in house and failing victims and survivors yet again. The press outside were only interested in calls for this bishop or that archbishop to resign. But its never that simple. We know that safeguarding is everyone's business and everyone's responsibility. Please be assured that safeguarding practice is much stronger and is better resourced in this diocese than it has ever been. I pay tribute to Hilary and her diocesan safeguarding team, and to the incumbents and parish safeguarding officers who lead at parish level. Safeguarding is Everyone's business, and we do it together.

General Synod also had an important session looking at Racial Justice, which is also on our agenda today. Racial Justice is not just a minority interest for people living or working in parishes that are more racially diverse than others.

Racial Justice is about Human Justice, living out the biblical vision of world where all people are created in the image of God, where all people should be given the honor and dignity that comes from that fact. The Diocese of Worcester Racial Justice Forum will present a draft Charter for Synod to consider today, and we greatly look forward to your involvement in this journey as we take it forward together.

We will look too at our Transformation Strategy, exploring what a follow up bid might look like. Later we will focus on mission and ministry in new housing areas, which will increasingly be springing up in almost every part of our diocese. We can often want to object when proposals come up in our area, and sometimes it is right to do so. But people need homes to live in, and when houses are finally built they will contain human beings made in the image of God, looking for welcome, looking for community, often wondering whether the church they see in the distance might be interested in them. The Cure of Souls, which is yours and mine, extend to them too. How will we respond?

I spoke on the Cure of Souls at general Synod in fact. As a parish priest for over twenty years, that was my job description, and what could be more glorious?! The care and cure of all the souls in your parish, the good and the bad, residents, workers, visitors. Each one a soul known and loved by God. To be entrusted with that is a gift beyond words. The Cure of Souls demands partnership working, for how could any priest possibly do this alone? It demands community working, because not every soul will be in your churches on a Sunday. It demands creative working, as you make church open to all and open to God, and mixed ecology responses as you ask God to help you reach the parts of the parish traditional church cannot reach. The cure of souls requires healthy curiosity as you develop interfaith and intercultural sensitivity, and whatever your particular parishes call forth from you. Now as a bishop I find that sharing the Cure of Souls with a priest at their licensing is again one of the highlights of my role. Seeking to set someone free to attend to the Cure of Souls in a parish or benefice or institution has to be the heart of my role - under the guidance and

protection of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd of every soul.

The Cure of Souls is our job as clergy, and it is the task of the whole church, the priesthood of all believers together. It is our duty, and our joy!

In his last words before he died St David said this:

‘Brothers and sisters, be **joyful** and keep your faith, and do the little things that you have seen and heard with me.’

So before we go on in the agenda, lets remember **with joy** that the **Lord is here**, that his spirit is with us.

Before we get on let’s first turn to our neighbour and share one thing however small, that has brought you joy this week:

You have three minutes!

Spt James will warn us to watch out for perhaps the most dangerous weapon in history: the tongue. Use speech wisely he says, perhaps especially in a Synod. Its easy to bless God with our tongue, he writes, while doing down our brothers and sisters, though they are made in the very image of God. And then our gospel when Jesus takes a little child into his arms and says 'Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' I've recently had the joy of becoming a grandfather for the first time. In her first months our granddaughter could only receive, and that is the key here. We don't build, construct or otherwise make the kingdom of God happen. Our job, Jesus says is simply to Receive. To recognize the presence of Christ in our midst, and to receive him with joy. Jesus will be amongst us in today's eucharist in bread and wine, blessed and broken, and in the word of God spoken and heard.