

**Presidential Address**  
**Governing Body, September 2022**  
**The Archbishop of Wales, Andrew John**

**'Everybody, soon or later, sits down to a banquet of consequences'**

This (and its variants) are mostly attributed to the author Robert Louis Stevenson, famed for 'Treasure Island' and 'The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'. The sentence, though not found in his works, is based on a genuine quotation from the essay 'Old Mortality' but like all sayings of this sort, it grows and evolves, is shaped and reused sometimes losing its essential meaning. Of course, it's uses primarily as a kind of warning, a judgement of the sort 'what goes around comes around' or in TikTok speech, 'Instant Karma'.

**The issues facing us**

The background to our gathering today and the situation more broadly in Wales, is being determined by several factors:

- We are experiencing more of what is referred to as the post Covid experience. There are ongoing consequences for health and well-being, national and global economies, and church life.
- A cost-of-living crisis rivalling that of the financial crash of 2008. The rate of inflation in July was the highest in 40 years.
- The real and ongoing influence of secularism and attendant decline of Church Sunday attendance across Wales. Like many other churches throughout the world, attendance levels have yet to recover to pre-Covid levels.
- The troubling and unstable geo-political situation. Now in its seventh month, the war in the Ukraine has had global consequences for the supply of food and fuel.

And I want to say a little more about the current cost of living crisis. The words I've used are well chosen: crisis. The reality for many more people across Wales and beyond, unless decisive action is taken in the next weeks, is that people will go hungry and cold and in their thousands. This winter will become unbearable and the cost to livelihoods, our well-being, the effect on household debt, the effect on crime and domestic violence will be considerable.

It is an outrage that in the 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, we have so many children living in relative poverty and so many who depend on foodbanks to survive. What was once intended to be an emergency service is now firmly embedded into the fabric of national life where families and many in employment (but at low wages) cannot survive without a local foodbank. I know the countless numbers who help in foodbanks (whom I thank sincerely for their work) agree that this should not be the case.

The situation is of course changing each day and how the government responds is something that we wait to see. However I want to draw your attention to something we are doing as a church and give notice of a sustained campaign to move this from advocacy only to action. From the middle of this month the Church in Wales will highlight each week one specific area of poverty and one action we can take as Christians. Let me give you two examples: the role of supermarkets within the country is well known and I want to pay tribute to the way many of them have extended their range of basics, removed 'best before dates' which allow food to be sold at a discount and their 'Too Good to Go' offers which again releases healthy food to be discounted and made available to the public. There are apps which contain details of how numerous brands (usually towards the end of the day) make good quality food available to avoid waste. But they could do more. Much more. I am asking them to triple the range of basics so that fresh food, some of which ought not to need cooking (and the associated costs), is made available so that people can also avoid some of the stigma which still attaches to foodbanks. But we need to be practitioners of generosity too which is why I will be asking every congregation in the Church in Wales, if they can, to make 10 shoebox size Advent boxes full of the basics of life (toiletries, treats, some non-perishable food) and to use the Foodbank distribution network as a means of ensuring they get to the right place. This would generate approximately 10,000 boxes. If we begin before Advent and make that our focus we will be able to alleviate, for some, the worst effects of winter. Some churches will be able to make many more than 10 and that is wonderful. For others, 10 might be a challenge. The important thing is that in order to advocate change in society, we need to model the generosity we believe lies at the heart of the gospel.

As we engage with these challenges, we ought to be clear about one thing at least: our task as a church has never been to try and save an institution. When organizations focus on themselves and forget their core purpose, they inevitably lose sight of the very thing for which they exist. Our core purpose has always been to worship God, to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and to make transforming disciples of all peoples. I have long been inspired by something St Paul said to the Galatian Christians which captures some of this:

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'. (2:20)

We also know that institutions which are driven by anxiety and fearfulness are much less likely to be attractive than those characterized by purpose and hope, grounded confidence and authentic humility. In the last year, many have realised that if we want to break new ground and mark a decisive shift in our effectiveness, we need the right kind of resources and more of them to make progress.

### **The decision of the RB Trustees**

Today I am announcing formally what many of you already know that the Church in Wales is providing significant additional resource for our ministry, the like of which we have never seen before. When the Trustees of the RB agreed to invest this money, it was a courageous step of faith. It was predicated on the conviction that the church has the will and the heart to grow and do new things. Across the dioceses and as a province this new funding will build capacity and create momentum which is precisely what we need and I commend that bold step. I want to pay tribute to the Trustees of the RB for their visionary leadership.

The proposed investment requires a strategy with several component parts.

In the first instance, we need to recognise that the two newer dioceses (Monmouth and Swansea and Brecon) do not have the historic resources of some of the long-established dioceses. I am pleased to be able to announce that the RB trustees have released an additional £3.7 million pounds each year for the next ten years which we will use to ensure that all dioceses have sufficient funds to operate core activities. In tandem, we will explore areas of our life together to ensure that unnecessary duplication of activity is curbed and that opportunities for collaborative working are seized.

Secondly, I can announce today that £100 million will be withdrawn from reserves over the course of the next ten years to resource evangelism and church growth in the Church in Wales. This is money we can only spend once and careful planning is required about how it will be allocated and how we will hold each other mutually accountable for its use.

There are some who are predicting the end of the Church in Wales and, possibly, do not even want us to succeed. We are regarded, by some, as a bit of a backwater with a conservatism and attachment to our past which makes us look backwards with longing rather than forwards with excitement, anticipation and faith. Hiraeth is our favourite word. Not all of the negativity comes from those outside our church family. And that is poor. Not all of it comes just from Wales. Perhaps there is some strange psychology here: the grim relief of someone sinking faster than you are.

So we ought to resolve that we are going to commit, together, to prove our detractors wrong. We are not going to go gentle into that goodnight.

The Church in Wales has already shown, during the pandemic, how quickly it can respond to challenges and to take bold decisions. We have no need to heed the voices of siren doom from wherever they come. Society remains largely sceptical of institutional life whether political or cultural or religious but this is as much an opportunity as challenge because faith in Jesus Christ no longer has the legacy of Christendom

### **A confident response**

So the question is quite simple: what might this resource enable us to achieve? The Bench of Bishops is consulting widely with others on the kinds of developments which are likely to be most fruitful. We already know that there are key territories which require new energy and investment. In order for our Mission and Ministry areas to work more effectively and fruitfully we will need to develop our ministries and skills base to maximise our effectiveness. In other words we are not expecting MA leaders and ministers to simply work harder but see the need for a stronger ministerial base which involves developing other ministries (commissioned and licensed) as well as rejuvenating laypeople as the heart of church life.

We want to set a high benchmark and deliver training which is world class. We do not believe that skills are the only essential at all: formation of the whole person means being alive to God in Christ, deeply self-aware and committed to one's own discipleship alongside developing new skills to enable us to become effective. I think Rowan Williams, quoting Dom Gregory Dix ('The Shape of the Liturgy') coined the phrase 'Eucharistic man' (and I include women too to be clear!) summing up the call to be remade in the image of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

We are 'a new human species who makes sense of the world in the presence of the risen Jesus at his table'.

We regard this kind of development as a shared, province wide undertaking to which all the dioceses commit themselves.

But we must also attend to our work within the MA for it is here that our primary ministry is undertaken. And we have seen several things:

We have seen that inherited church life has so much still to offer. Whether because of the life events potential or the weekly nurture of faith in worship, whether in the sacralising of secular life (such as civic engagements) or the work with schools and other associations, it is the established church which, animated by the Holy Spirit, discovers that God is one step ahead, opening doors, creating new spaces and opportunities for engagement and making the gospel relevant and exciting. However the inertia which exists all too often is born of a legacy from which we struggle to free ourselves. Stipendiary clergy are often struggling with diaries too full to do the things which are necessary. The day-to-day work can squeeze the diary leaving little room to plan and oversee a missional community committed to an outward focus.

Reframing the tasks can be much harder to achieve than to state in a presidential address. Forgive my rereading of a Pauline text but all too often we let the church squeeze us into its mould (Rom. 12:2). A Mission/Ministry Area Leader is called to preside in an MA and to ensure all the critical and necessary tasks of ministry flourish. The priest who thinks they are the only source of ministry will not survive in such an environment: we are called to a ministry of oversight which enables others to flourish and be disciples in the world.

And this means investing, all of the dioceses, in additional resource which allows our MA to reach their potential. This will mean investing in new lay ministry, fully supported and authorized. It may mean additional clergy. It will necessitate the appropriate administrative support to ensure sound delivery of plans and projects.

But inherited church cannot deliver all we hope for. It has been a source of enormous encouragement to see some of the new initiatives which represent either pioneer work or church plant taking place in Wales. And we are committed to expanding both of these areas, sharing the lessons learned and being willing to work across the dioceses so that we see our task as a shared enterprise. I am grateful to the bishops of Llandaff and St Asaph for agreeing to pioneer further the church plant initiatives so that the whole church can learn from their experiences.

How we will invest across the church but in the unique context of each of the dioceses is a question which remains for our prayerful consideration and our consulting with Governing Body is a part of discerning together and listening to what God is saying. But let us be in no doubt: this is the most serious and significant investment the church has known since its disestablishment. The plans we intend to develop will be radical, far reaching and have capacity to deliver on our deepest longing and hopes.

### **The next steps**

So the next steps require our participation and prayerful engagement. Have we got this right and where are the gaps? What have we missed or minimized? How can we deepen our sense

this is a Kairos moment, born of hopes and longings for the Kingdom to come? How can we ensure stronger stake holder ownership of the vision which involves each and every one of us?

It is to these questions and others we must now give our attention.

## **Conclusions**

I began with RL Stevenson and his banquet of consequences: 'Sooner or later we all sit down to a banquet of consequences'. If we let this time pass and this opportunity dissipate, the consequences will be a Wales that knows less of the love of Christ than at any other time in modern history. But if we commit ourselves to the conviction that God is calling us to be bearers of hope in a new way, we will have done something profound, beautiful and lasting. The task is not to try and spend ourselves out of trouble but to invest in the places where our hearts burn with a new energy and hope. Such an investment brings huge gain and is full of potential. Here the banquet of consequences is laden with much fruit and many good things.

Amen