

The Dean



This year the Church of England has once more commissioned a review of Cathedrals, chaired by the Bishop of Stepney, the Rt Revd Adrian Newman who had previously been Dean of Rochester. Some of you may remember he was consecrated bishop at the same service as our own Bishop Nicholas. I made a naughty quip at the start of my sermon on that day asking why a Dean would ever possibly want to change and become a Bishop. A question which this year I have had to answer for myself!

The working group which Bishop Adrian chairs is producing its report in the very particular context of cathedrals in crisis. It's a familiar pattern. In 1992 Lady Elspeth Howe chaired a similar commission which produced the report 'Heritage and Renewal' after Lincoln and Hereford Cathedrals had gained national reputations for poor management of resources and people. Peterborough and Exeter Cathedrals have recently created similar anxieties because a breakdown of financial disciplines and collegial relationships have made them look unsustainable and both Deans found themselves needing to resign. These sad situations have thrown a spotlight on a number of other Cathedrals which are struggling to work to a viable business

model. In simple terms the responsibilities of being a Cathedral Church – opening their doors to visitors, worshippers, the diocesan and civic communities whilst maintaining ancient and much loved buildings – demand more expenditure than is available from existing income. Despite some heroic efforts in places like Coventry, Blackburn, Bradford, Truro and Guildford there are no easy solutions as to how such Cathedrals can make ends meet.

The task of the current working group is to explore whether there are fatal flaws in how Cathedrals are run which are making matters worse. All Cathedrals, large or small, run along the same lines. How they operate and make decisions is laid down in the Cathedrals Measure, a piece of legislation which was the result of the earlier Howe Commission. For instance, it introduced the formal role of Lay Canons, Cathedral Councils and Finance Advisory bodies. All these recognise that clergy, however talented, need the skills of those who work in worlds such as finance, marketing, education, communication and heritage tourism if they are to keep these complex organisations stable and successful in their purpose of making spiritual impact.

In addition the working group will need to consider what appropriate help the Church of England and wider society can give to ensure that Cathedrals prosper. As we know, a large proportion of our population find their way to Cathedrals and thereby experience both a sense of national treasures and vicarious religion, the legacy and inspiration of the Anglican faith in ways they can still relate to although few of them now have any familiarity with church attendance or the Bible. In many cases it is our Cathedrals

who introduce individuals unschooled in the Christian faith to the riches and reality of God's beauty and goodness. It is our Cathedrals which very often remind people after their sense of faith has grown cold that there is always a 'welcome home' sign hung outside every church door.

A review of why some Cathedrals struggle to make ends meet can only be a good thing, though we would also wish Bishop Adrian and his fellow workers to keep perspective. We are not the only Cathedral which is thriving and we have good reason to be proud of our day to day, week by week achievements. We are brimming with blessings: the gifts of exemplary staff, dedicated volunteers, ambitious fabric programmes, regular financial surpluses and excellence in worship which routinely offers a taste of the divine. We are never complacent or self-satisfied. Nor are we disregarding of the pressures on our fellow Cathedrals just down the road but there is a steadiness and quality about our life which ought to inform the work of reviewing Cathedrals just as much as the sense of crisis in a minority of places which are not coping.

I will be sorry not to contribute to this latest review of Cathedral life but the invitation to be Bishop of Llandaff is taking me to new pastures and into a very different role. Only that sense of vocational call from God would have persuaded me to ever relinquish the privilege of serving in Salisbury. There will be new challenges for me as I change both Diocese and Province. The Church in Wales will soon be marking the centenary of their separation from the Church of England and its disestablishment following the First World War. Llandaff is one of the six dioceses in Wales and I'm expecting to find it a wonderful mix of diverse communities from the Vale of Glamorgan to Port Talbot,

from the industrialised valleys to the heart of a capital city. There will be an element of returning to roots for us as Paul was born very close to where we will be living in Cardiff.

When change happens in our lives, especially unexpected change, it often feels sudden and swift. My family has certainly gone from feeling immensely happy and settled in Salisbury to managing a huge transition. In it all we've been sustained by the generosity of the Cathedral community which has rejoiced with us and sent us on our way to a new life with such wonderful affection and the promise of their prayers. It's impossible to express adequately the value we put on our two decades spent in Salisbury or the gratitude we feel for the memories, the events, but most of all, the people, we have treasured.

Within my abiding sense of gratitude there is a special place in my heart for the Friends of the Cathedral. For the Chairmen, Secretaries, and Treasurers with whom I have worked, all of them wonderfully dedicated to what the Cathedral seeks to achieve. A special thanks goes to Duncan, Kate and Chris, who are the brilliant current team.

All our Friends, near and far, play a remarkable role in supporting and progressing the Cathedral's ambitions. I do not intend to give up my membership of the Friends so will look forward to reading my copy of 'The Spire' in years ahead. Who knows, maybe there will be a Friends' outing to Llandaff Cathedral and tea in the garden at Llys Esgob ('Bishop's Court') in the years ahead? Know that I will be forever in your debt for the friendship and trust which has been your gift to me. I will be thanking God in all my remembrances of you, and may God bless you for all you do for his Cathedral Church of Salisbury.