

The Acting Dean



As you may know, I have kept bees for nearly 25 years. There is an unfortunate state into which colonies of honeybees can sometimes get, by accident or ill-management, of being queenless. This means that there is no functioning queen in the colony, and the problem is twofold: the queen's steady supply of new eggs should mean the continuing strength of the colony; and the pheromones exuded by the queen are what keep the colony together. Without the queen for an extended period, the colony becomes a major problem to the beekeeper, and will ultimately die out.

Well, to apply the obvious analogy, one could suggest that Salisbury Cathedral has been queenless for nearly a year at the point when I write this. But in at least one respect the Cathedral is better constituted even than the timeless natural order of social bees. Important as a dean is to the organisational structure, that structure also has a time-honoured arrangement for keeping things running, and we have a strong

team of clergy and senior lay staff who have between us not only kept the wheels from falling off but also moved forward steadily.

I'll pick out some obvious points during this past year, but the thing to bear in mind is that one of this organisation's great qualities is to adapt and innovate, to assimilate new people and to say farewell to past members, in an almost seamless way which might seem to imply that nothing ever changes!

Last summer of course we had our grand farewells to June as she moved to her new responsibilities in south Wales. Considerable numbers (a testament to her major contribution here over the years) from Salisbury journeyed to Brecon and Llandaff for her ordination and enthronement in a new country (the land of my fathers, as it happens).

I became Acting Dean, which in practice has meant chairing major meetings (Chapter, and so on) and attending quite a lot of additional outside meetings (e.g. Bishop's Council); I've also had to act much more as spokesman for or general lead of the Cathedral. None of my own work has gone away meanwhile, so inevitably this has been an extremely time-constrained year for me. But one of its real pleasures has been working much more directly with Jackie Molnar, the Chapter Clerk; we meet frequently and have found it quite easy and fruitful to work together. I have also made a point of emphasising that the Cathedral is led by a team and not just by an individual, and have been keen to depend upon our very able colleagues.

Comings and goings: at June's suggestion, we brought The Very Revd Charles Taylor into that team for a year





from August, and it has proved a superb suggestion; Charles and Catherine have made a distinctive and invaluable part of our clergy and Executive team. Sarah Rickett left (also to the Welsh borders) after 13 years in what has become a key part of the Cathedral's life, what we now call Learning and Outreach. She leaves a major gap, but I look forward to Ariane Crampton's imminent arrival and her fresh insights.

I'm delighted that Nick Papadopoulos is returning here as our dean. He is an old friend, and will bring his own many insights and gifts. Once again, the process of that appointment placed tangential pressures on our organisation, which it handled smoothly and well.

Like every other institution and business in Salisbury, we've had to handle the utterly unforeseen circumstances of the attack in early March, which vaulted us

into the forefront of the world's news and an international crisis. It would be fair to say that the Cathedral has been playing a key part in the recovery of Salisbury, a process that may go on for quite some time yet. This also has made major demands on the time, focus, and energies of several key staff, and is again a testimony to the strength and quality of this organisation and its many parts.

Nick will take the reins in early September, and among the many reasons why I keenly await his arrival is that June's leaving meant I had to sacrifice a long-arranged period of study leave in the autumn of last year. So I'm hoping to reclaim some of that time and the opportunity for study and to be more reflective than has been remotely possible during the busyness of this past year.

Edward Probert