**Insights and values**

In recent months, hundreds of people have responded to the invitation to share their stories. These stories aren’t simply factual accounts of what’s happened. Many also reflect deeply on the story tellers relationship with God, the place of prayer in their lives, and the ways in which their faith has flourished or been challenged during this season. Each story is unique and holds truth in and of itself. But when placed alongside other stories they become valuable in a new way, helping us notice themes and bringing greater depth to the understanding and learning we can take from them.

We can already see some broad themes emerging and important questions being raised. Here are just three of them which describe something of the tension as well as the creativity..

1. Being forced by the pandemic to do things differently has enabled the flourishing of lay leadership, even when it’s not recognised in those terms. Alongside this, for many *clergy* there’s been anxiety that despite *trying their best* their efforts aren’t valued or sufficient. So, how might we encourage the continuing development of varied lay ministries, while also valuing and supporting the specific vocation of our clergy? Something worth pondering and thinking about further.
2. While some people have discovered new patterns of prayer, at home and in nature, others have struggled to find ways of connecting with God without the use of their buildings or the regular support of the gathered worshipping community. How might we encourage people who are taking fresh responsibility for their own discipleship, while not losing the importance of inhabiting sacred space together?
3. Thirdly, the practical and pastoral support being offered in many communities has been valued, but some have also perceived an absence of the church’s prophetic voice.

It seems to me that we are slowly recognising that this pandemic may well be a moment of significant change in the life of the church, a kind of paradigm shift. The disruption has caused us radically to change what we do, and perhaps what we think too, in ways that most of us haven’t previously experienced. It is becoming clear that returning to the way we were before will be hard, if not impossible. These insights, and many more, will I hope enable us to better discern God’s calling and grapple with the significant challenges we face as a Diocese. The important thing is that we remain hopeful, and open to the possibility of new insights in the practice of our faith. It’s physiologically impossible to be both fearful and curious at the same time – fear is the enemy of curiosity. So if possible let’s banish fear in favour of curiosity.

And that brings me to a brief word about the values which have been identified as being important for this season of our diocesan life together.

Values are principles or standards of behaviour. They represent our judgement about what is important in life. They are also goals – ways of being we aspire towards, and as such, they have to be practised. They don’t happen by magic but need our intentionality. The values identified for our Diocese are attentiveness, creativity and generosity.

If we are to live by them, we need to practice them, and to do that it may help to inject some specificity into what could otherwise be quite vague and difficult to get a handle on. So I want to encourage you as individuals and as communities to spend a little time identifying some concrete things you might be able to do that will help breathe life into these values.

So, for example, what things might help you be attentive, to God and to one another: perhaps committing to a particular discipline for your prayer life, or creating space in meetings to listen to one another’s experiences; and so on. For each value, consider identifying two or three specific ways in which you might practice and further develop them.

BUT, having said that, I’m acutely aware of high levels of weariness amongst many. So for those who simply don’t have the energy, please don’t see this as yet another initiative. I want to suggest that these values can also be gifts.

So, for example, being attentive may mean becoming aware and accepting of the loss that we have experienced. Consider giving time, simply to attend to your emotions, *to be* on your own or with others. Dwell in the darkness and emptiness and see where this leads you and allow for the possibility that you might encounter God in new and unexpected ways.

Personally, I struggle with creativity. Some days it’s just enough to get through never mind feel creative. If you recognise that feeling, consider immersing yourself in the creativity of others: listen to some Mozart, glance at your favourite art work, visit a virtual museum, go for a walk and soak in the creativity of nature. Do whatever refreshes your soul and allow yourself the space to be re-created.

And finally, generosity. This isn’t all about giving to others. How might you (how might each of us) be open to receiving generosity? Our life together is one of ebb and flow. Sometimes we feel strong and can lead, give of ourselves, with energy to explore new and exciting horizons. Other times we are fragile and weary. This brings its own opportunities to learn new things, in new ways and with humility.

And so, in Christian community, we carry one another, all the while learning new things about ourselves and about God.

+Guli Loughborough

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