**KEA DIOCSAN SYNOD ADDESS 2022 by Bishop Ferran Glenfield**

**TOGETHER AGAIN**

Members of Synod we are Together Again after two years of meeting online

due to Covid. We thank God that we are Together Again. In welcoming you,

I would also like to welcome our guests.

Later in our proceedings, I will ask you permission for some of our guests to

address us. In particular, I welcome Canon Andrew Ison and representatives from the Ballisodare group of parishes: Mildred Gilmore, Wendy Lyons, Carl Kilroy and Marie Maxwell Davey who are attending their first in-person Synod, since the group was transferred to KEA. It is also lovely to renew fellowship and partnership with the stall holders representing organisations who always add value to our Synod. You are all most welcome.

Since we last met together in 2019, Covid has clouded the horizon and traces of the virus remain. One word summarises the experience of Covid: Loss. We lost people to the virus.

Loved ones are no longer with us. People lost their health, livelihoods, education and confidence because of Covid. As a church we lost momentum in realising our 20/20 VISION.

Sadly, church attendance has dropped. Some people have got out of the habit of church going, others are still nervous about returning to church. Our work among children and young people has been set back. Clergy struggled to perform their usual pastoral and service duties against the backdrop of Covid restrictions. Covid damaged our relationships.

People became more isolated and frustrated which did not help in maintaining the bond of peace in our churches. Much has been lost because of Covid. There is much to be recovered

which is going to take time and demand patience.

On the other hand, there were some aspects to the Covid experience that helped us. It taught us about things that really matter: health, family friends faith and support. We learned new skills and used new tools. Technology came to the rescue, enabling us to keep in touch, and to conduct services and meetings online. Through technology we were able to reach a wider constituency and to conduct the business of parishes and diocese alike. We will carry this learning forward. Diocesan business will be done on a blended basis, with a combination of online and in-person meetings determined by agenda and the seasons. So, we have set ourselves to meet in person from Easter to mid -October and online in the darker and more wintry months. To date, this approach has increased participation at meetings and is more environmentally sound and given the rise in fuel prices, cost effective.

Remarkably despite the disruption of Covid, the overwhelming majority of our parishes and the diocese as a whole were able to keep their heads above the financial waters, as evidenced in the Book of Reports. This remarkable achievement was due to the generosity

of people and the foundational work that the diocese undertook in the past five years to secure our sustainability. We are indebted to our administrative team: Sarah and Ruth during Sarah’s maternity leave and Ann for their ongoing work. We are delighted that Sarah is back with us and rejoice that Sarah and her baby daughter Grace are thriving. Sadly, we need to note that this is the first in-person meeting of Synod, since Maud Cunningham’s passing. We still feel her loss.

In 2015 we launched our 20/20 VISION. Can I remind you that we aspired to work together to resource each local church to fulfil its role in the community.? Much, has been achieved in the past seven years. I regret that because of Covid we were not able to celebrate these achievements in 2020. May I give you three examples of how the 20/20 VISION is working out on the ground. First ,we reinstated three Archdeaconries, not for ecclesiastical decoration but as entities to resource clusters of parishes in our widespread diocese. I am pleased to report that through the good offices of our three archdeacons that the Archdeaconries are active in bringing clergy together, supporting the work of Select Vestries and acting as a focus for ministry among children and young people. They have got off to a promising start.

The second example is the development of Ordained Local Ministry. In the past five years we have identified, trained, authorised and deployed seven Ordained Local Ministers:

John Addy, Adam Norris, Albert Dawson, Steve Frost, Xanthe Pratt, Ed Smyth and Malcolm Young. Two more are about to start their training in January 2023: Damian Shorten and Faith Sithole. I want to thank these men and women who answered the call of God on their lives to serve his church as ordained ministers. I call on us all to affirm and support them in their ministry. The Diocesan Council are working on scheme to assess parishes served by

these self-supporting ministers who do not receive stipends.

The third example of the outworking of the 20/20 VISION is the emergence of a new church community in Sligo, RECENTRE, ably lead by Alan Williamson. This new church was forged in a partnership between Sligo Cathedral and The Church Army. Already RECENTRE is outgrowing its premises, a former shop and office. This fresh expression of church is an indication of the old and the new working together for the Kingdom of God, which I believe can be replicated in other parts of the diocese. The Church of Ireland are planning to invest in starting and supporting these new church communities across Ireland. I believe that we are only at the start of a journey to renew the church and reaching out to people who never attend traditional church. I hope that KEA is at the vanguard of this renewal.

Two of the most impacted sectors hit by Covid were health and education. We pay tribute to health care workers in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Their dedication to caring for people at home, in care centres, in health Centres, hospitals and surgeries along with Covid testing and vaccination centres was costly and exemplary. We owe them a great debt and pray that they will find recovery in their vocation as winter approaches increasing pressure on them. Likewise, the vital work done in schools and colleges was adversely affected by Covid. They are playing catch up with children’s and young people’s education, which is no easy task.

Change has been the order of the day in many of our schools under Church of Ireland patronage. New principals have been appointed and are in place in National Schools such as

Ballinlough, Belturbet, Billis, Carbury,Kilmore,Longford, Rathowen and Riverstown. We secommit to pray and support these new principals and their staff as they seek lead schools of excellence for our children. We must also acknowledge the tremendous work of Boards of Management who oversee the health of schools they serve. Two of our secondary schools, The Royal School Cavan and Wilson’s Hospital Schools, have appointed new principals: Padraic Corely and Frank Milling respectively. We pray for them and their staff

as they seek to deliver high quality education to young people alongside navigating the shifting sands of culture which seeks marginalise the Christian nature of these schools.

We should not forget Sligo Grammar School and Michael Hall its principal as well.

May I single out The Royal School Cavan for a moment. In the past two years the Royal School has transitioned from a fee-paying school with borders, to a non-fee -paying day school. The Board of Governors to the decision to move the school into the free sector

in consultation with all the stakeholders in the school. The aim of this move was to grow the school and to make it more sustainable for the future. In partnership with the Department of Education, a building programme has started to provide the school with modern accommodation and sports facilities. Already, enrolment this school year is up by around 25% which is a promising start. The school is hoping to grow to 420 students from a base of 220 students. The school exists for Protestant young people and there are sufficient numbers in the catchment area to fill the school. However, it is up to parents and children in the Protestant community in Cavan to opt for the Royal School. I trust and pray that this takes place.

As I begin to wrap up this address, I want to thank my clerical and lay colleagues for there selfless service. They have endured much in recent years and have come through by the Grace of God. Since our last gathering in 2019, we have said farewell to Rev. Richard Beadle, Archdeacon Isaac Hanna and Rev. Malcom Young. We thank God for them and pray his blessing on their new spheres of ministry. We also welcomed Rev. Mark Smith to the Kildrumferton group of parishes , Canon Andrew Ison whom I previously mentioned and Dean Gerald Field, who has retired to Roscommon and who is helping us there have also joined us. Damian Shorten has stepped down from his role with children and young people. He did a great job in some many areas. We wish him well as he remains in Riverstown and prepares for ordained ministry. Warren and Annalyse Humphreys have just arrived in Cootehill to take up roles in ministry especially among children and young people. Clare Russell will soon start working in the Ardagh archdeaconry in schools work and we hope to appoint a suitable person to do similar work in Sligo. I am also grateful to the many people who serve on our Diocesan committees. We have a superb team of volunteers. Thanks, is also due to Ruth Garvey-Williams and the Scribe team for their excellent monthly publication and to Jenny Horner who lubricates our communications.

We have just passed through an unprecedented global pandemic and we live in a deeply unsettling world. War is raging in Europe. Ukrainians are facing brutal aggression. Many have fled to our land and a number worship in our churches. Our hearts are open to them.

The economic and political outlook is uncertain. Inflation is eating away at household and business budgets. Sudden change is everywhere. The death of Queen Elizabeth took us unawares. The awful tragedy in Donegal reminds us of how fragile life really is. This is the background in which we do our work of bearing witness to Jesus Christ in this corner of Ireland. It would appear that the tide for Christianity is going out in Ireland, as it is in most Western countries. The church is like a beached boat lying on its side on a sandy foreshore. What can we do? Well, when the tide is out, we can maintain and repair the boat, making it seaworthy. We can also look after the land -based crew and tend the beach, removing the debris which is ugly and damaging. And above all, we need to pray, to cry out to God that we might be sustained until the tide returns. Out there, beyond the horizon in the ocean of God’s love is a wave, which will become the next incoming tide. God will see to it as he has done in the past. The tide will come back in again and we his people will rejoice. Our boat will float once more. May his name be praised for his great faithfulness and loving kindness.

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