***Speech Diocesan Synod presentation ‘But the Lord looks on the heart’ report.***

***Anne Lodge***

Greetings and blessings to all Diocesan Synod delegates in these strange times. I am very pleased to be able to do a short presentation about the document that was shared with you entitled ‘But the Lord looks on the heart’. This reports on the survey of parish incumbents in Dublin and Glendalough conducted in summer 2020.

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to all those incumbents who took time to respond to the survey in the midst of the busyness of an early opening of churches for worship. We had a response rate of over 60% which gives us really credible and detailed information. I am especially grateful to those incumbents who found photographs to share for the report – thank you for going the extra mile. I am also very grateful to all in the diocesan office and to the archbishop for support in carrying out this research which is done as part of my self-supporting ministry in support of the diocese, so at no cost to the diocese.

2020 has been a most unusual year with a great deal happening on the global stage. Attention was drawn internationally to the ongoing scourge of racism as a result of a series of events and protests. The protests began in response to the killing of a black American man, highlighting ongoing issues of institutional racism in the United States. It broadened to consider the legacy of slavery as we have seen on our neighbouring island, leading to questioning about how the legacy of a problematic past is handled. The Church of England has been challenged to acknowledge its ongoing difficulties with regard to how it treats immigrants, people of colour and its own history. The global protests and raised awareness has impacted us in Ireland.

This seemed a good time to update the very good work that was done in 2005 by a diocesan committee established by archbishop Neill in response to the first report of the Hard Gospel project to General Synod in 2004. This report indicated that there were racist attitudes, fear of difference and fear of change in evidence among members of the Church of Ireland across the island. The Welcoming Angels report was produced by the Dublin & Glendalough committee chaired by Rev. Sandra Pragnell in 2005. It reported on a survey of parish incumbents which indicated that globalisation had come to the Church of Ireland in these united dioceses, though primarily in suburban parishes. It shared advice rooted in scripture and theology about how to welcome and support newcomers in our congregations.

Fifteen years on, much has changed. Newcomers are no longer ‘new’. Our united dioceses has worked on a number of initiatives encouraging us to look outwards and share our faith such as the Come & C project. This was framed around the 5 marks of mission of the Anglican Communion.

2020 seemed a good time to update the information that had been gathered in 2005 for Welcoming Angels and to reflect on the 4th mark, *to transform unjust structures in society* as it applies to our reflections on our own actions in our parishes and united dioceses.

The map of the world shown on Slide 3 gives us an indication of how global our united dioceses have become. Our congregations include people from north and south America, from across Asia, the Middle East, Africa and across Europe. Some of our churches have long-standing or more recent arrangements to share space with congregations of Christians who are in communion with the Church of Ireland.

The table on pages 12 and 13 of the report gives a very good idea of the spread of nationalities and continents to be found in our parishes. It also shows the extent of the globalisation of some parishes – from as high as 60% on a typical pre-COVID Sunday. Almost half the parishes report an increase in their globalisation since 2005 and only three report a reduction. The 2016 Census tells us that 11.6% of the Irish population is of overseas origin. Just over half of our responding parishes report at least that level of globalisation in their congregations.

Two of the parishes who shared photographs with me have been using global maps to highlight the global nature of their congregations and these are shown on Slide 4.

Incumbents were asked to identify the blessings that globalisation has brought to their parish. Section 3 of the report outlines the broad-ranging responses that I fitted under two overall headings.

First, many incumbents stressed the blessing of broadened perspectives and outlooks brought about through the arrival of newcomers to the parish. Incumbents were clear that this had a positive impact on faith, and helped people to understand God’s love of all and the universal nature of the Christian church.

Second, many incumbents reported on the great variety of blessings brought by the newer members of parishes in serving God and serving the community. This included contributions to worship, support for parish activities, the sharing of new skills and taking on of support and leadership roles.

Incumbents were asked to identify if any challenges had emerged through increasing globalisation. People responded very honestly to this, noting that the blessings already described could sometimes lead to discomfort and fear of change among the long-standing indigenous members of the congregation. This was something that incumbents had to manage carefully.

Incumbents reported a handful of occasions when such discomfort went further into expressions of racist distrust or lack of respect. Those incumbents dealing with these types of incidents reported learning to challenge such incidents rather than sweeping them under the carpet.

Incumbents also understood that some issues were the result of cultural misunderstandings or biases and that the onus was on the incumbent and other parish leaders to help people work through those misunderstandings and to build trusting, positive relationships.

Another area singled out by incumbents as a challenge is that of linguistic diversity. Incumbents reported really creative responses in individual parishes to helping people with limited English to participate as fully as possible. Others talked about the blessing of the parish national school which had a comparative wealth of experience to support learning in the parish.

Experienced incumbents were generous in their advice to other parishes. They highlighted three key areas that had worked for their parishes.

First, they described the benefit of engaging newcomer parishioners and others in worship activities and in finding ways to recognise the diversity of cultures and languages in the congregation. Some used special occasions such as the World Day of Prayer, others integrated services from different parts of the Anglican Communion into their own worship rota or intentionally used the range of languages in the congregation at Pentecost for example.

Second, incumbents recommended including people from across the range of the congregation in leadership and support roles in the parish. This includes formal roles such as readers, church wardens, members of Select Vestry, and less formal roles such as the coffee or cleaning rotas. They noted that participation in such roles also built intergenerational and intercultural friendships.

Third, incumbents recommended social and cultural events such as ‘international nights’ to foster friendships and sharing of cultures and food. One incumbent talked about having an informal welcoming group whose role is to befriend new arrivals or people on their own at after church activities or church social events.

However, it is important to remember what one very experienced incumbent said. That person advised that every parish is different and every incumbent has their own unique style. People need to work in their context and be willing to let things evolve locally rather than trying to follow a ‘one size fits all’ model. Many incumbents, including this person, stressed the centrality of building positive relationships and of modelling faith-based respect for all.

The incumbents had advice for the united dioceses as well. They hoped that formal mechanisms such as the diocesan website and magazine can be used to share the diverse stories of global and local parishioners. Incumbents were also keen that the global arrivals to our parishes and dioceses be able to speak for themselves rather than being spoken about by others.

Incumbents were keen that both informal and formal mechanisms be found at diocesan level to diversify representation to reflect current realities. They were also keen that the diocese create spaces to explore diversity of worship that is properly Anglican but that also reflects the multi-cultural reality of our Church of Ireland in Dublin and Glendalough.

Incumbents were keen that those in leadership positions in the United Dioceses would preach prophetically against racism, intolerance and disrespect both in Church and in the wider society. They also hoped people in leadership roles would lead by example.

Some incumbents noted how good it was to have shared arrangements with other congregations in communion with the Church of Ireland for use of churches for worship. They noted good examples of shared structures to manage such arrangements.

Based on the report, I have made 8 recommendations which you can read in Section 7 of the report:

1. I recognise the need to move beyond the perspective of incumbents to engage with the laity and to ensure that the diverse range of voices are heard. I am offering to continue this research and to provide a second report to the Diocesan Synod in 2021 based on this broadened range of experience and insight.
2. It was very clear from the responses to this survey that there is significant experience and expertise among the incumbents in the United Dioceses and I recommend that consideration be given to establishing a group to work together for a time-limited period to collate and share that expertise so that all colleagues can have the benefit of it.
3. We all recognise that there is a wealth of scripture that addresses a range of issues pertinent to the focus of this report. I recommend that a set of four bible studies (2 old testament, 2 new testament) be collated for use with parish groups where people wish to use the resource.
4. There are already a number of diocesan advisors dealing with a range of areas. I recommend that consideration be given to the appointment of a diocesan advisor with a cultural and ethnicity welcome and inclusion brief.
5. It was suggested that ways be found to enable the range of voices and stories to be heard beyond individual parishes. I recommend that conversations be had with those who manage diocesan website and other communications media to explore ways in which this might be progressed.
6. In order to explore realistic ways of broadening formal representation at diocesan level, I recommend that the archbishop and senior diocesan personnel (lay and ordained) investigate workable and constitutional ways of broadening representation.
7. Very good examples of successful sharing of churches with congregations in communion with the Church of Ireland were documented by respondents to this survey. I recommend that good practice in this regard be collated, share and encouraged.
8. After the survey had been circulated, issues regarding statues and monuments connected with slavery emerged internationally and in Ireland. This may impact some of our churches. I recommend that an audit be conducted across the United Dioceses to ascertain whether such monuments etc. connected to the slave trade can be found in any of our churches. Should such articles be found, I recommend that consideration be given to the option of having a simple explanatory notice put up in the relevant church about that monument.

Thank you all very much for your attention and may we all meet again face to face for prayer, for discussion and for hospitality before too long!