



Deacons in the Church of God

A Pastoral Letter for the Teulu Asaph, from Bishop Gregory
9th July, 2020

Last Saturday, perhaps one of the strangest events in 900 hundred years happened in the Cathedral. In one sense, the cathedral had seen it all before; it was an ordination, joyous, prayerful, focussed on the action of the Holy Spirit. On another level, there could be no physical congregation – everyone present had a necessary part to play in the proceedings – and at one point in the service, everyone present had to don visors, in order to ensure personal protection, as we necessarily had to come within two metres of each other for the laying on of hands. It was both faintly ridiculous and deadly serious at the same time.

After discussions with the Welsh government, it had been decided that diaconal ordinations could proceed, on the grounds that it was a necessary part of their beginning of ministry, but sadly, our priest candidates will have to wait until the autumn, with the hope of easier times to come.

So, how did it feel in the cathedral last Saturday? First, surprisingly holy. Our cathedral is a “thin place”, where the barrier between heaven and earth is thin, having been a place of prayer, word and sacrament for nearly a thousand years. The gathering of people in earnest desire of seeing the Lord at work generated a sense of excitement and expectation, a sense that the Spirit was moving in that place.

Second, it was humbling. Our nine diaconal candidates are so varied: young, old, male, female, married, single, Catholic, and Evangelical. They each bring a story, of different life experiences, of different journeys of faith. There are ways in which for each one the spiritual journey to the Cathedral that day has lasted years,



and been challenging, perplexing, inspiring, and transformative in turn. It was humbling as well to know that all nine feel that not only is God calling them to ministry, but that they are ready to invest their ministry in the teulu Asaph. There is something about our Church life that has caught their imagination and makes them keen and enthusiastic to share in our life and witness.

Third, the cathedral was alive with hope. These nine new ministers are deacons, servants of Jesus Christ, and called to be ambassadors of his love and of the Gospel to the world. God will use their wisdom and insights to bring them alongside people whom they can help. They will bring new life and new perspectives into the life of the teulu Asaph. We are changed by their vocation, and God will do new things through them; things that none of us, themselves included, can yet realise or anticipate.

“O magnify the Lord with me, let us praise his name together.” (Psalm 34.3) I want to thank God for all that he is doing in our midst. These nine are tokens, symbolic of the work that God is doing in our common life, and building our future. I am excited by the potential exhibited in the dedication offered in these lives. I hope that that excitement is shared by all across the diocese. These nine are tokens, and representative of what God is doing in a myriad other ways in our diocese, affirming those already ordained, enabling lay ministries as people offer their own gifting and talents to the work of building God’s Kingdom.

At a time when the Church is greatly challenged about its future and the viability of our present structures, I see last week’s ordinations as a down-payment of hope that God isn’t finished with us yet: indeed, that he has great plans for us.

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