



YR EGLWYS THE CHURCH
YNG NGHYMRU IN WALES



ARCHBISHOP OF WALES and BISHOP OF SWANSEA AND BRECON.
THE MOST REVEREND JOHN D E DAVIES
ARCHESGOB CYMRU ac ESGOB ABERTAWE AC ABERHONDDU.
Y PARCHEDICAF JOHN D E DAVIES

*Father, we hold before you our family in the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon
and we open our hearts and minds to your Spirit.*

*Bless us as we gather in your name;
guide us as we grow into the likeness of your Son;
lead us by your Spirit to go out and make disciples of others.*

God of our journeying, be our way and our truth and our life; our beginning and our end.

We pray through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

May 2021.

My Friends and fellow disciples in Christ Jesus,

My time as your Diocesan Bishop has come to an end after thirteen years of what, I hope, has been faithful service on my part. I have done my best.

It's been a time which has seen many challenges come in our direction, not least in relation to the way in which ministry is understood, delivered and supported financially. Some of these challenges have been profoundly unsettling, and have been complicated more recently by the COVID19 pandemic. I commend all of you for your particular resilience during such times, and for your commitment to supporting others in need of comfort, compassion and love. I also commend you for the faithful financial support of your churches even when, because of legal restrictions, you have not been able to attend them in person.

Many challenges have, however, been around for some considerable time, and it has fallen to our generation to recognise, however uncomfortable doing so has proved to be, the necessity of facing them and addressing them. They will not go away, and they can't be left for some future generation to tackle. Underlying them has been and remains a call to re-examine who and what we are called to be and to do. This is the call which I made when, in my early months as Bishop, I addressed all our Deanery Conferences. Without this we know, in our hearts, that in some places there will probably not be a future generation to rely upon. So, we must be both positive and trusting, and we must press on..

Our Diocesan 'strapline', GATHERING GROWING GOING, demands of us that we affirm that we gather, not as a group of like-minded individuals, committed to the maintenance of an institution, but as a family of disciples, committed to growing more obediently Christ-like. In doing so, we become more obviously attractive and better equipped as ambassadors for both the Gospel and the Faith. In such a state as this, we are so much better equipped to go and make disciples of others, the fundamental job-description and purpose given by Jesus to the infant church. That church found strength and courage to do its job - found that it had something to say to the world's people -

when, obedient to Jesus and trusting each other, they gathered as a family for what was to be the first Christian Pentecost. The effect of their obedience and their trust was staggering.

The fact many of you are embracing, some more readily than others, new ways of approaching our life as a church leaves me with some sense of joy and hope for the future. I am convinced that such new ways, set alongside the trusted and tested ways that are familiar to us, but which don't speak to the thousands around us who never set foot in a place of worship, are absolutely the right way forward.

I have quoted Henry Ford a number of times in my ministry:

'If You Do What You've Always Done, You'll Get What You've Always Got'

At present, what we regularly get, in many places, is a decline in numbers and, therefore, increasing financial demands being made of ever-smaller congregations simply to enable us to stand still and survive. Those demands can only diminish if we have more worshippers in our churches – unless, of course, we are prepared to see further cuts in your clergy numbers which will make things even more challenging than they are at present. Such short-term financial measures will not bring about a lasting improvement. The lasting, and complete solution is in focussed, accessible mission and evangelism.

As I move on, I urge and encourage you to continue to grow in hope and in a commitment to work together with your brothers and sisters in the faith to develop deeper trust, sharper vision and greater courage. Value and improve what is precious in the past and in our traditions, but recognise that we cannot simply go on only doing what we've always done, and be ready to put aside and rid ourselves of what disables our mission and strangles our hopes. Recognise, as you reflect on this, that where new things are developing or have been developed, fruit for the Gospel is borne.

With such a spirit we can be confident that your next Bishop will inherit a Diocese more fit for purpose, more committed to its journey of faith and up for growth. I hope with my whole heart that when the Diocese celebrates its centenary in 2023, further and real progress will have been made.

It is a great source of regret to me that, in readiness for retirement, we have been unable to hold a diocesan service of thanksgiving and farewell, but it is hoped, with the permission of others, this may be possible in the summer. Letters are one thing, being able to say 'goodbye' face-to-face is another. During the vacancy, the Bishop of Bangor, Bishop Andrew John, the Senior Bishop, will be formally responsible for oversight of the Diocese, and he will work closely with the Archdeacons in discharging this responsibility. Please remember all three in your prayers along with the members of the Electoral College which, when it can meet, will be responsible for electing the next Bishop.

With my thanks for our fellowship together and with my love and prayers as always.

+ John Sumner + Broom