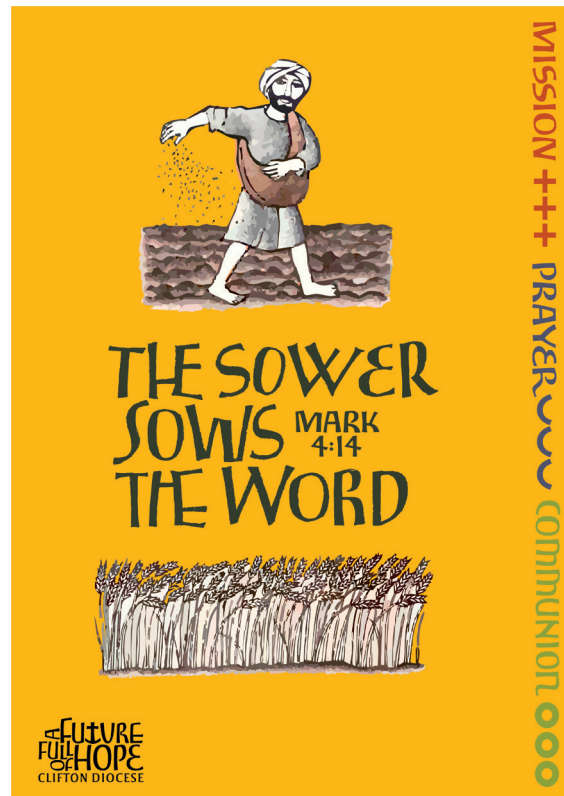


DARE TO DREAM

2021



A FUTURE
FULL OF HOPE
CLIFTON DIOCESE



MISSION

OUR BISHOP'S VISION

The Church of Clifton is called to be a people
who believe in Christ, who celebrate Christ,
and who live the way of Christ.

The Church is created by God to live, not for itself, but for others;
to be a people who share in the mission of Christ,
to proclaim the Kingdom and to make disciples
so that the world will be transformed according to God's plan.

COMMUNION

Our Parishes and Communities should be places
where Christ is celebrated,
shared, proclaimed and lived,
where everyone is welcomed and valued,
and all have a sense of responsibility
for the life of the community and the world.

PRAYER

We are called to be disciples who not only know about Jesus
but also come to know him in prayer.
Our liturgies should be celebrated in such a way
that Christ's word is heard, his presence known,
and which are so connected to our lives
that we joyfully take up the command
'Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life'.

A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP DECLAN LANG



Someone once said to me; if we do not dream, how can we shape the future?

The seasons of Lent and Easter are an invitation to share the dream of Jesus, a dream which he called the Kingdom of God. These 40 days of Lent and 50 days of Easter are times to renew our understanding of and living by the dream of God. We do so as members of the Body of Christ because as we are reminded on Ash Wednesday, it is the whole community, young and old who enter the Lenten call to be reconciled to God and one another and to be ambassadors for Christ.

As we look to the future, we need to have a dream which broadens our horizons from just looking at ourselves and our parishes and enables us to be missionary disciples. Where is our mission and how can we live it more faithfully.

Change is going to happen. We can look at it positively or negatively. As Moses said to the people of his day, when they were experiencing a time of change; I set before you life and death. Choose life. (Deut. 30:19)

The way ahead may not always be clear, but we believe in the promise of Jesus that he will always be with us until the end of time. In that is our hope, that the Lord walks by our side, even when like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we do not always recognise his presence. But we will recognise him at the breaking of the bread.

I commend this resource for Lent and Easter as a way to dream the Kingdom of God and to shape the future of our diocese.

Rt Rev Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton
St Ambrose, Feast of Candlemas, February 2021



Dare to Dream

2021

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
(John 8:12)

No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together". Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all. ⁱ

This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek – and to commit to act in our daily life as we have dreamed of. What I hear at this moment is similar to what Isaiah hears God saying through him: Come let us talk this over, let us dare to dream. It's a task for all of us, to which each one of us is invited. But it's a time especially for the restless of heart, that healthy restlessness that spurs us into action. Now more than ever what is revealed is the fallacy of making individualism the organising principle of society. What will be our new principle? ⁱⁱ

2020 was an unimaginable year and, as we move through 2021, we continue to live in uncertain times, in a world overwhelmed by a pandemic which has shaken our very existence and way of life. The pandemic, Pope Francis says, has caused deep wounds, exposing the vulnerability of us all. His response to this is an encouragement to 'keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus' (Heb. 12:2).

In his Catechesis: 'To Heal the World' Pope Francis reflects,

'In the midst of this pandemic, our eyes are on Jesus, and with this faith embrace the hope of the Kingdom of God that Jesus Himself bring us. A Kingdom of healing and of salvation that is already present in our midst. A Kingdom of justice and peace that is manifested through works of charity, which in their turn increase hope and strengthen faith. Within the Christian tradition, faith, hope and charity are much more than feelings or attitudes. They are virtues infused in us through the grace of the Holy Spirit: gifts that heal us and make us healers, gifts that open us to new horizons, even while we are navigating the difficult waters of our time.




Renewed contact with the Gospel of faith, of hope and of love invites us to assume a creative and renewed spirit. In this way we will be able to transform the roots of our physical, spiritual and social infirmities and the destructive practices that separate us from each other, threatening the human family and our planet’. ⁱⁱⁱ

It is within the context of this backdrop, this pandemic, that we can be encouraged to create our future, a future full of faith, hope and love. It is a call to renew and to transform. To dream dreams of what we can be as a community of communities within the Diocese of Clifton. Together we have something to offer to others in terms of our faith in God who has shared in the uncertainty of human life, that we know doesn’t offer easy answers, but whose promise is “I will be with you”.

Over the past three years, within the context of ‘A Future Full of Hope’, our diocese has been reflecting upon three key areas of what it means for us to be followers of Christ in the 21st Century. These three areas of Mission, Prayer and Communion, have highlighted for us that we are being called to witness to the saving mercy of God, expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and to do this in the context of a world which is crying out in need. As with many other dioceses we face huge challenges but, without diminishing the potency of these, there are also great opportunities. We could, if we choose, decide to batten down the hatches and retreat into our small enclaves, attempting to maintain the status quo, or we can make a commitment to remembering why we exist as a Church; to rediscover how we are called to live the Gospel and serve our world and bring people into a relationship with the Lord, today. Yes, we face a church with a diminishing number of active priests, and since the pandemic the possibility of a diminishing number of parishioners. This can cause us to be anxious, but we are a people of hope. Hope as St. Paul tells the church in Rome, is critical to the Christian life. *‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit’* (Romans 15:13). James Mallon is clear that this hope is not the same as optimism. When we are optimistic, we tend to view things with rose tinted glasses, ignoring those things which conflict with the way we wish to see the world. Hope on the other hand, allows us to look at the whole picture with all its positive and negative components. Hope, *‘throws off the shackles of denial to stare reality in the face, sure that God is going to do something new, even though what he might do is not readily discernible.’* ^{iv}

Even though we do not yet know how, or what the world might be like post pandemic, we are being challenged by God to face our reality. This might cause us anxiety or fear, but our faith tells us that we do not do this alone. God is at our side, walking with us, accompanying us on our journey. As St. Paul reminds us *‘If God is for us who can be against us.’* Romans 8:31. Working together, sharing the challenge and utilising the gifts and talents of everyone will enable us to flourish and bear fruit. By embracing the relationship which clergy and lay people are called to have, one that is rooted in co-responsibility, we, immersed with faith in the Holy Spirit to guide us, will find the way forward, the way which enables us to respond to the great commission. It would be easy for us to focus on the wrong questions – the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of parish life, without ever reflecting on the purpose of our being here at all, which is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We gather as the faithful so that we may be nourished to feed the world, to take all that we have received and take it out beyond ourselves to those who have yet to hear this great story. If we are to move forward, if we are to grow and bear fruit, we must keep this mandate in mind.





Pope Francis has, throughout his pontificate, been clear about the direction of our travel. He says: *‘I dream of a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything so that the church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for self-preservation.’* The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light – as part of an effort to make them more mission orientated. ^v

‘This Church with which we should be thinking is the home of all, not a small chapel that can hold only a small group of selected people. We must not reduce the bosom of the Universal Church to a nest protecting our mediocrity’... ^{vi}

In his latest encyclical, ‘Fratelli Tutti’ on Fraternity and Friendship’, Pope Francis offers a penetrating reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan which engages every one of us and the global community in a self-examination of conscience. Each day we need to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders. Our mission in the Church is to see the needs of the whole world and respond accordingly. It is to reveal Christ to others who do not know him, so that they may be given a new lens through which to view the world and their part in it. Our mission, as we move forward, is to be one who is actively seeking out the lost, binding up their wounds and making space for them in our hearts and home.

Moving Forward - Dare to Dream

“Given that the Church is mandated by Christ to be missionary, evangelising and outward-looking, a reform of her structures is continuously required in order to respond to the challenges of the day. Naturally, this involves a certain reorganisation in the way the pastoral care of the faithful is exercised, so as to foster greater co-responsibility and collaboration among all the baptised.”^{vii}

In order to start the process of embracing a new reality, with or without COVID-19, and commencing with Lent 2021, Bishop Declan invites every parishioner to participate in a time of discernment, reflection and prayer. The focus of this discernment calls us to reflect on how the Catholic Church within each area of the diocese will respond to the call to be parishes of mission, responding to the great commission of Christ to ‘Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Mt. 28:19).

This process of discernment is not simply the responsibility of the bishop, priests or deacons, who cannot be expected to work in isolation from the wider community. Every Catholic Christian of Clifton Diocese, as part of their baptismal rite, is called to be a co-worker in this process of discernment and decision making for the future of our diocese.

Co-working and co-responsibility are not new concepts. Pope Benedict makes clear that pastoral co-responsibility is in fact the fulfilment of the ecclesiological vision of Vatican II. In his address to a pastoral convention in Rome 2009 on the theme of ‘Church Membership and Co-Responsibility’, he said: *It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, (1 Cor 12:11) He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit”. These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church* (LG 12).

The purpose of our parishes is something we all have a responsibility to nurture. Every member of the parish has been endowed with a gift or gifts and is called to take a personal share of responsibility. As part of our ‘Year of Communion’ we were invited to reflect upon this idea of co-responsibility and how we develop a mentality of abundance rather than scarcity. The pandemic has not made these reflections easy, but it has highlighted how well we can work together to support one another when we need and choose to. This desire to remain in communion with one another and to reach out to the wider world is indicative of the potential we have as communities to engage with the deeper issues which face us in the coming years.



Pastoral structures and change will not take place without ensuring that the laity can take a full and active role in how our parishes strive to be places of welcome and belonging, places which nurture opportunities for people to come to know the Lord and grow in a deep relationship with Him. Working together will require a change of mindset, perhaps even a change of heart. It will require everyone to believe that 'we are in this together'. This does not diminish the role of the clergy, rather it enhances the role they have in fostering and nurturing the spiritual and apostolic growth of every person in the parish, so that their commitment will bear fruit and encourage others. At present it is very difficult for people to meet physically. However, it is possible for each one of us as individuals to begin this process, to dream dreams and be ready to contribute to the future conversation that will need to take place. This is our opportunity to seek and find a rich and life-giving approach to responding to the Gospel as Church and as communities of faith. Please do take part and use the materials provided to help your reflection.



Dare to Dream – an Invitation

The pandemic we are living through does not look as if it is abating. Life continues to be uncertain and challenging. However, the space we have been presented with gives us the opportunity to engage in a time of listening, reflecting and preparing ourselves to determine the future of our diocese. Most of us are aware that by Autumn of 2022 it is likely that the number of priests in active ministry under the age of 75, will be 44. Some of these priests will be in their seventies and many in their sixties. The laity will need to be ready to support their clergy and work with them to ensure that the mission of the Church is not undermined or diminished. Whilst change is often challenging and difficult, changes in how we move forward will be necessary.

Important to this journey is the need for us to keep our eye on the ultimate goal which is all about growing dynamic and flourishing parishes for the future, where Christ is at the centre and the gospel is being proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Lent will be the backdrop for these reflections beginning with an introductory session and followed by weekly reflections starting on the 1st Sunday of Lent through to the 5th Sunday of Lent. Materials will be available with this document on the website and include a video reflection followed by a gospel and guidance for your personal reflection. It is hoped that your reflections and thoughts in response to the questions posed will enable you to participate in discussions when we are next able to gather. You may find it helpful to keep a journal, recording your thoughts, your ideas, your hopes and your dreams as well as your questions and your concerns. Throughout the reflections you might like to consider what your own role might be to support the diocese as it moves forward.

Keeping our Focus

As we move through Lent it will be important for us to remember why we are being asked to do this. When we come to discuss ways forward the challenge for us will be to hold in mind what lies at the heart of our discernment. This is not about keeping churches open or saving Mass times. It is about how we use our resources wisely and generously so that our parishes are places of nurture and growth to serve the mission of the Church. This does not just happen. It requires us have a desire to be true disciples of Christ, to be intentional about this and to understand what it means to accompany others. At every Mass we are commissioned to go and spread the Gospel. We are a 'sent' people. When Jesus came into our world, he 'pitched his tent' (John 1:14) in the heart of humanity, meeting people where they were and never sitting in the temple waiting for them to come to him. We are called to do the same thing – to pitch our tent amongst the people, to share the love of God, revealing Him by our own love and desire to welcome anyone who cares to cross the threshold of our churches. We cannot wait for them to come to us. We are commissioned to go out into our communities and live what we believe, as beacons of light and hope.



Approaching the Lenten Reflections...some small guidelines:

- These reflections can be done by an individual, a family or a parish group.
- Identify a specific time and place in your house where you can be quiet and not interrupted.
- Decide at the beginning how much time you can give to this prayer time. (30-45 minutes?)
- Create your own personal 'sacred space' by lighting a candle and placing it on a table with a cloth. You might also like to add an icon, crucifix or Bible.
- To watch the video, you will need a laptop, Ipad, tablet, Smart phone or a Smart TV with sound.
- Take time to be still and prepare yourself mentally.
- When you are ready read the introduction to the session, watch the video and then proceed with the rest of the prayer as offered.

An introductory session is offered so that you can familiarise yourself with the process. It is suggested that you use this in the lead up to Ash Wednesday, in the week prior to Lent beginning, (Ash Wednesday is 17th February).



- i Fratelli Tutti 8, Pope Francis
- ii Let us Dream - The Path to a Better Future, page 6, Pope Francis in conversation with Austin Ivereigh ©2020
- iii General Audience Pope Francis, 5 August 2020
- iv Divine Renovation Beyond the Parish, page 23, Fr James Mallon, 2014
- v Evangelii Gaudium 27, Pope Francis
- vi Pope Francis in an interview with Fr Antonia Spadaro, 2013
- vii Presentation of the Instruction ‘The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church’, by Monsignor Andrea Ripa, Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, 8 July 2020



DIOCESAN PRAYER

God our Father, open the horizons of our minds and hearts
so that we can see what hope your call holds for us.

Pour out the overflowing gifts of your Spirit so that we, your Church,
may become a people of hope for our world.

We ask you this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

Our Lady, Woman of Hope, **pray for us.**

St Peter, Rock of Hope, **pray for us.**

St Paul, Apostle of Hope, **pray for us.**