

20 October 2019 Waymark Feedback

This morning, rather than a sermon based on today's readings, we wanted to bring you feedback from last weekend, when a number of us from St Brandon's attended the Durham Diocese Conference, entitled Waymark.

All licensed clergy were invited but also a lay representative from each parish, and our diocesan Children's Council and newly formed Youth Council.

So St Brandon's was well represented and all four of us who were there will bring some thoughts today.

We begin with Liam Dietz, who was there as part of the Youth Council, the only one of us who stood on the big stage at the front and presented to the whole conference.

- Liam, how was the weekend for you?
- What did you present to everyone?
- What was the most important thing you will take away from it?

Now over to Alison Hobbs and Alison Moore for their thoughts.

Today's readings urge us to remain confident in the power of prayer and scripture to teach us who God is, and how he longs to help us.

That is really good to hear this Sunday in the wake of the Waymark Conference of last weekend, at which Bishop Paul gathered representatives from every church in his diocese; we met in a room that could hold 500, and it was filled to capacity. We were there to listen to scripture, to the voices of experience in the national and international church, to the voices of the young and the old, to the voices of experience in the local, and in our own church.

We were there to start conversations about what flourishing might mean for our churches, what does growth for God look like, and what do we mean by success, anyway, as a church? How do disciples get found and formed; what are the elements that go into building effective disciples? What's our experience? What's their experience? How might we be needing to think about this?

Every conversation was framed by listening to speakers, or worship – and breaks for refreshment! It was intense, it was focussed, it was purposeful, but it was not conclusive. That is because the purpose – summed up by the crook the Bishop holds, is to start the Diocese on a metaphorical journey together to find out what, as the whole of Durham Diocese, we should pay attention to in the next five years. The picture is one of us all on the move together: pilgrims on a journey to get a better view of the landscape before we settle on the new pasture.

Is this beginning to sound familiar?

A few weeks ago we came together as St Brandon's to consider our next directions as a church. We pictured ourselves getting aboard our boat logo – [*point to cover of service book*] – and Setting Sail: letting the cross that is on the sail lead us to new things. Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to fill the sail and power us.

Both are great metaphors. Both are valid, essential, and coherent.

What we discover together through ‘Setting Sail’, will become part of the mix of discoveries about what is happening, what new thoughts and directions are emerging in churches across Durham. It will be, if you like, what the pilgrims spot as part of the new landscape that comes into view during this year-long pilgrimage that Waymark has initiated. AH

*(Alison M)*

Waymark – a much hyped two day diocesan conference or gathering. A three line whip for clergy, with at least one congregation member from each church.

Did I feel enthusiastic? I’m afraid I did not. Apparently it was all about listening to everyone in order to prepare the next 5 year plan for the Diocese. I am wary of 5 year plans! I was expecting: a lot of presentations and graphs, relentless optimism about new initiatives, little reference to depressing facts about reducing numbers and no money, . . . and of course plenty of sitting at tables discussing and feeding back. . .

However. . . I was wrong! It did not feel like that at all.

There were indeed 500 people present, on day one in 10s around tables, on day 2 in rows facing the platform. They were long days – 9.30 to 5.30 and 9.30 to 1.30. BUT - it was very well and carefully planned and organised. Half hour chunks, plenty of coffee and food breaks. Two hosts compered the programme setting the tone informally but clearly.

Lots of worship – led by an experienced worship band, all the words on a big screen, not the usual style for many or most of us there, but we found ourselves joining in with new songs as well as familiar hymns.

Two external speakers – (one man, one woman, one lay, one ordained) - Bishop Emma Ineson from Penrith, Matthew Frost from Guildford. Bishop Emma talked about the beatitudes and Matthew Frost about discipleship for all of life.

Discussions at tables? – yes, but focussed on clear questions that arose from the talks. Answers were placed into envelopes that were then gathered in and will be looked at. Rather than opening the floor to anyone, a few people from very different contexts and churches were asked to comment. A presentation about youth and children by . . . the children’s and youth councils themselves; perceptive reflections from the visiting ecumenical representatives; introduction to the bishops council members (like the PCC for the diocese); opening and closing addresses by +Paul (who was in jeans and sweatshirt except for the eucharist)– adamant that the next 12 months really are for listening, pilgrimage and seeing what emerges. Unlike other public figures, currently making adamant statements, I think I am inclined to believe him.

*Concluding comments AB:*

I hope you are encouraged by what you’ve heard so far.

Those of you who were here last week will know that I wasn’t able to attend the whole conference because we went to visit family following a sad bereavement.

Thank you so much for your love and care, your cards and most of all your prayers.

But I am greatly encouraged to be part of a diocese which is moving forward in the way we are:

- **Not as isolated churches, some ‘successful’ and others struggling, but grouped together to support each other.**

For us that mean a recognised deanery link with the two benefices nearest us: St John’s Neville Cross, St Margaret’s and Bearpark led by Revd Barny Huish, and the Langley Moor, Meadowfield and Brandon churches, led by Revd Carl Peters. We will support each other in a more focused way and the clergy will meet together to pray and talk- not rocket science but it works!

- **Secondly as we’ve heard, the diocese is listening, and especially to younger voices, and so must we.**

What the children’s and youth council brought us on Saturday was challenging and prophetic and we must listen. Especially in caring for God’s creation, where our young people will lead the way. I hope we will take this seriously here at St Brandon’s and build on all that has been done before so that our whole way of being church reflects the priority of being stewards of this good earth.

- **Finally, events like Waymark remind us that we are part of something much bigger**

Hearing specific, real and local stories of where God is at work across the diocese reminds us that we are all part of his big story of salvation.

God is bringing hope and healing, rescuing people today from despair, addiction, sadness and anxiety, and he is using local churches to do it....

I want us to be a church community who know we are part of something bigger, both in geographical terms across our local area and diocese- joining with other churches of all denominations, sharing the wonderful resources we hold with others to bring refreshment and encouragement...

And I want to say that everyone- every single member of this church from the oldest to the youngest, the newest to the longest attendee, has their particular and unique part to play.

I don’t have a blueprint for Brancepeth any more than Bishop Paul does for Durham Diocese. I agree with Alison- I don’t like 5 year plans!

But I am sure, that God has good plans for his church here and across this local area and Diocese, as we entrust ourselves and all we do to his Holy Spirit.

And I count it a privilege to travel with you, to set sail together and see where the Holy Spirit leads us in the years ahead.

PAUSE  
Lets pray.