



The Bishop of Lincoln

Raising the Spiritual Temperature – Paper One

What do I mean?

Introduction

Raising the Spiritual Temperature is my key phrase and theme as we approach Phase Two of our diocesan vision and plan. What follows is live thinking rather than any kind of systematic theology. As bishop, I am the receiver and bearer of our apostolic tradition, energized by our current celebration of 1,700 years since the first ecumenical council at Nicaea. My task is to express, to root and to present our faith in today's context, being loyal to Scripture, historic formularies, reason, experience and the ecumenical and conciliar tradition. In doing this, I tend and call God's people to be sensitive to the prompting of the Spirit today.

What I offer here is a miscellany of many of my regular tropes and themes as your primary pastor and teacher. It introduces and underpins where the next phase of our identity and life may go, subject to the agreement of the widest possible conversation in our parishes, chaplaincies, schools and other networks. It assumes our continued commitment to be faithful, hopeful and joyful, seeking to transform lives in Greater Lincolnshire.

I have written this introductory paper following a request that I should set out what I mean by this phrase 'raising the spiritual temperature'. It does not pre-empt a wide discussion about our identity and purpose over the next ten years when I will only be a memory. Indeed, it is written with many questions to prompt that conversation about our godly ambitions for the future. I am committed to the Church of England's vision to be simpler, humbler and bolder.

In Matthew 13.31-32, Jesus says: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.' Raising the Spiritual Temperature seeks to recognise that God's kingdom grows in hidden and unexpected ways. We see growth in secret, surprise and encounter. We witness growth in the simple gifts of invitation and (perhaps unexpected and unplanned) response. I see Raising the Spiritual Temperature as the seedbed for our Christian life: where everything starts, continues and ends.

Raising the Spiritual Temperature is not a ‘thing’, a noun that can be described, but an idea and an activity, something which will gain force as it is fleshed out in practice.

Time to Change Together

Together we have achieved a great deal through the progress of Resourcing Sustainable Church and moving into Time to Change Together, including:

- scaling back central costs and creating a more obvious focus on parish support at Edward King House;
- the remarkable self-definition of churches, using different ‘types’ to discern and reflect vocations;
- the work of the Covenant Pastors and improved Covenant Pledges, which contribute directly to mission and ministry in parishes;
- changes to the shape and structure of our common life, which are nearly complete;
- we have come a long way and I am grateful to our bishops, clergy and lay people and our devoted parish support staff - thank you.

As we now seek to move forwards – from *Time to Change Together* to *Time to Grow Together* – we need to examine how we inhabit the life that we are creating together under God. The Spirit propels us but does not compel us. Nonetheless, we are called into the Body of Christ, delighting in the diversity of culture, gifts and personality. The focus on being ‘we’ is at its best when it gives the ‘I’ the courage to speak; the focus on the ‘I’ is at its richest extent when it properly acknowledges the blessing of the ‘we’. I believe that, as your bishop, I am called to serve a fruitful reciprocal difference in which there are no losers and where we always seek to honour the highest degree of unity, even or especially where there is profound difference.

Identity in Christ

As St Paul teaches us, in Christ ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3.28). Paul follows Jesus in his revolution of love which breaks away from love and virtue only being available to free men and fully includes slaves and women in the fullness of humanity. If we are in Christ we are a new creation. This is our shared identity. It is therefore something to rejoice over that we have a number of overlapping cultures in both the Diocese of Lincoln and the wider Church. There is not an exclusive language in which the gospel can be proclaimed. My experience of Global Majority Heritage churches is that interculturality brings freshness and scale for growth. I have just as much time to treasure those with a deep love for God’s Church who witness through service more than words.

What does a sustainable pattern of worship, discipleship and service look like which expresses our joy as the Body of Christ?

At the Last Supper Jesus took bread, offered, blessed, broke it and handed it out. He does all of this with us: he takes us, blesses us, leads us to the Cross to be broken but never to be destroyed. He then hands us out to be his bread for the world. In the power of the Spirit He wants his Incarnation to continue in our flesh and our purpose to reveal Him in the world.

I say to candidates at every confirmation that they have become lights in the dark world for Jesus as they bear candles lit from the Easter Candle, the sign of the Resurrection Light that cannot be extinguished by our sin. We support one another across our often self-imposed boundaries to be signs of resurrection in crucifixion situations.

How might this cruciform ministry shape our Local Mission Partnerships? Through our life together, how are we seeking to become the individual disciples in our own setting within the Church that God is calling us to be? How do we express that local knows local best? How do we do this with others, together?

The Life of God

Raising the Spiritual Temperature is primarily about our relationship with God. The Christian life is one lived on the outflowing of the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

God reveals himself to us as Trinity:

- God the Father, greater than great.
- God the Son, more loving than love.
- God the Holy Spirit, closer than close.

We use the language of inviting Jesus into our lives. This is only possible because God has already invited us into His. I hear lots of talk about community, but we have something far greater to share - communion. As we are drawn into the life of the Blessed Trinity, we are not just a community of self-selected members, we are called into a supernatural communion at the heart of the Mystery of God. The Greek word 'perichoresis' is used to describe both the perfect interaction of the three persons of the Trinity and their distinctiveness. It is often pictured as a perfect dance of mutual love and its outpouring upon all Creation. We are all dance partners in the divine life, joining in with clod-hopping enthusiasm, two left feet for God. It is fine that some will be toe-tapping wallflowers and that others will dance on the inside only. There is room for all, with no sunset clauses on the invitation we receive.

We live in the reality of grace by revelation and by mystery. My second paper will address how we are drawn into the dance of God and my third will set out some proposals for developments that I think will support our spiritual growth. In this paper I am simply laying out the stall, contemplating the ground, and baring something of my soul - which I feel it is time to do now that we have spent some time getting to know each other.

Some further realities to face

Before concluding, however, I think it important to acknowledge, that as the saying goes, trust leaves on horseback and only arrives on foot. Along with the rest of the Church of England, the Diocese of Lincoln has been coming to terms with safeguarding failures. As a diocese, we have made good progress in seeking to address the past and to make our churches as safe as we possibly can in the present and for the future. We have worked to build relationships with victims and survivors, and to train new generations of Christians for whom safeguarding is a gospel imperative. The INEQE Audit, while pointing out areas on which we must work, was widely affirming of our collective effort. Thank you!

Alongside side this, however, the diocese has experienced other forms of failure - of initiatives, and of behaviour - all of which leave their mark and affect our spiritual well-being. Moreover, we are living in a time of general anxiety and turbulence for both Church and world.

The primary reason that I am here is to help us to move on well from these things. When I was appointed, I knew that because of my age I would not be with you in person for a long ministry. My task is to help to shape and affirm a positive culture for the Diocese - and Raising the Spiritual Temperature is part of this culture. We need leadership in every context and at every 'level' which is godly, benevolent, predictable and kind. I have a long back story in supporting faithful improvisation in every level of church leadership, after the apostolic pattern revealed in the Acts of the Apostles; I am passionate about doing this. We need to commit ourselves to even greater transparency and accountability in every part of the Body of Christ, including the bishops, other senior clergy and laity and diocesan trustees.

In short, hope comes from living the realism of Jeremiah as lament: for what we feel we have lost through Covid and our other challenges, including the inevitable one of social change. We then progress through acknowledging what we have lost to the vision of hope in Isaiah 40. There are no short cuts. Nonetheless, the encounter with Christ on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 teaches us that there is a future, but it is not necessarily the one we thought we had.



Donatello's statue of the Penitent Magdalene depicts St Mary Magdalene as a penitent hermit – she is aged, wise, and humble; her body bearing the marks of penance, her hands clasped in prayer, her mouth open in supplication, her gaze focused on what lies ahead, her foot ready to move on. When the statue was renovated it was discovered that Donatello had run gold leaf through Mary's hair as a sign of her being touched by glory. Like Mary Magdalene, let us discover what it means to live a life shot through with the glory of God. Our spiritual temperature will rise as we open ourselves to the Father, seek to follow his Son in humble joy, and allow our hearts to be shaped by the Spirit. It is Time to Grow Together.

BISHOP OF LINCOLN

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