

THE ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN READERS

2021 Reader AGM President's Address

The Rt Revd Dr Nicholas Chamberlain

If you will please forgive me and indulge me - a little - I intend to offer you a report a little like the ones that I think I remember from my early days as a school governor. I was first a governor in 1992. It was the days before Local Management of Schools. Before Academies. Before Multi-Academy Trusts. It was the days in which the Annual Meeting of Parents happened on a mid-week evening, five people turned up on a good night, plus the governors and head teacher, and everyone went home quickly and happily. Annual reports were short. This did not mean that the reports were unimportant, nor that significant things were skated over, but it did mean that there was a kind of understanding that it was the work and life of the school into which effort was poured, and I kind of relish that trust and emphasis.

Now, I realise that in governance terms, there is a real need to attend to accountability as an organisation, and I am not seeking to undermine the accountability of the Readers' Board and its officers to the members of the Association, or to the people of the diocese and region - how could I with the guru of good governance Canon Bacon sat beside me and with the absolutely conscientious and responsible Chair of the Board, Sue Slater on my other side? But I am acutely aware that this last year has not been a normal one, and that your energies as fellow ministers, as a Board, as God's people in the Diocese of Lincoln, have been poured into the life of the local Church - and I think that that is absolutely correct - and I want to thank you for it - as the President of the Board, but also as one of the bishops of the diocese. Your energies have been poured into serving God's people, into leading worship, into maintaining the teaching of the faith, into pastoral care, that has been your primary focus, and the maintenance of the life of the organisation, as it were, has been, I think, put into its correct perspective: the organisation is there to serve our purpose, and our purpose has been to sustain the life of the Church and to point to God's kingdom in some of the most challenging circumstances that can be remembered.

This second year of the pandemic has been more difficult even than the first, I think: I could say 'thank you' in my address last year, all of us having been through the experience of the first lockdown, and I could look back on our shared grappling with furlough, or trying to migrate worship and pastoral care online. And I could also reference the contribution of Reader colleagues not only to the active life of the church but to the praying and thinking and responding that was the first stage of Resourcing Sustainable Church. But during this last year, as we have coped with uncertainty in terms of regulations, stop start restrictions, less of a sense of absolutely shared experience, the following stage of moving to implement what is now A Time to Change Together, I think it has been harder. We are more tired. Some people have responded by becoming less willing to share - they have been made anxious. Many have continued to be personally affected by the impact of the pandemic, and my observation is that as services remain stretched, as costs rise, as cuts take

hold and as we are faced with the impact of our decisions and votes, if we have had opportunity to exercise that power, then things all look a little more tough.

‘Aha’ you could say, here is Bishop Nicholas, back on form, glass half empty. But that’s not what I’m trying to express. I’m simply trying to acknowledge that this has been a year in which so much has been done by so many people of great goodwill and deep faithfulness, but that when you try to look for evidence of achievement on paper, it isn’t so straightforward to find - and that that’s OK. The Reader Board has met. Your Warden of Lay Ministry has been her extraordinary, loving, wise and immensely hard working self. Your officers have fulfilled their responsibilities with care and commitment. You have all been putting God’s people first, coping with colleagues, coping with work - or lack of work, coping with the virus, coping with the Church. You have been wonderful. I am not ‘half empty’ about the Readers of the Diocese of Lincoln. Nor am I ‘half empty’ about A Time to Change, Together. This is our shared, agreed, way forward, and we will move forward, serving God’s people and proclaiming his kingdom, together. So what I am trying to express is actually immense hope, the immense privilege of ministering with you as colleagues, and my immense thanks to you all.

And now I will take my own medicine, shut up, and invite anyone who chooses to ask questions or to make comments. The year 2020 to 2021 has come to an end. Next year’s report will be different.

Oh. And not as an afterthought. But as a final headline: 9 new Readers. 9 new Readers, in this most difficult of years, and others who have moved into the Diocese and who have contributed so wonderfully, most recently Lesley. Now that is an achievement to record and to report!