

Swanwick 2008 – Bishop Anthony's Address

I wanted to start by giving my thanks and welcome right at the start; welcomes to all of you and particularly those of you from Tanzania and Nuremberg. We are really grateful to you for travelling across and gracing us with your presence and strengthening the Companion Links that we have. It has been lovely to speak to most of you so far and I look forward to seeing you more in the next few days.

I wanted to thank the Planning Group at this stage, because they have put in a vast amount of time and energy and work (*applause*). You will have discovered that they are the ones with the green labels! Archdeacon Malcolm stepped into the breach with the chairing of the group, as I think most people here will know, for the very sad reason that Carl Attwood had to retire on health grounds. Kathy and I spent the evening with Carl and Sally on Saturday; he is doing really well but, still that has to be relative to his illness. And sadly Carl's mother died on Friday. He was hoping to be able to join us here, but he isn't therefore able to do so and so we continue to keep them all in our prayers.

It was three years ago that John Tiller retired and Ian Terry had to step into the breach then to chair the group and this year Archdeacon Malcolm has stepped into the breach. If I might particularly express admiration and thanks to Sarah Cawdell as she has done a vast amount; as well as all the others of you on the Planning Group: Freda Davies, Norris Boyland, Kevin Cecil, Jane Davies, Alison Fawcett and Peter Massey – I hope that doesn't miss anyone out! As has been mentioned already, there has been valuable input from others outside the Diocese and we are really grateful to you all for that.

Rooted in God

When I was reflecting and thinking about what I might say this evening, I did what I think lots of us do when you are back in a context that you have been in before, and after I had already decided on the bulk of what I wanted to say, I thought I had better look back and check that I hadn't said all that three years ago! So I did have a look and three years ago, I saw that I ended up talking about eight different themes in terms of our vision. I was intrigued to see (I won't ask any of you if you can possibly remember, as I couldn't!) that the two that I had began with were worship and speaking to others about our faith more explicitly. I then expressly used the language of telling our stories – and here we all are, three years on, Sharing our Stories!

There is always a certain amount of nervousness in advance of a Conference like this, particularly on the part of the planners. They think: "Is it going to go alright? Are people going to arrive? Is it going to go with a real oomph?" Part of the reality, it seems to me, for a Conference like this especially here in our own Diocese, is that, in a sense, it can't fail: some of us can muck it up by degrees or different bits or we can get some bits wrong, but essentially it can't fail because of you all, us all. We are all here for the three days, there is a real buzz when everybody arrives, there was a real buzz during the last session which I think was tremendous, a wonderful way to start a conference and a real buzz over meals. It's bound to be like that because each of us is catching up with old friends, people we've not seen for a while, meeting up with new people and making new friends, and therefore hearing their stories. It's what we've all been doing. It's part of what we look forward to when we come away and have the time for a Conference. That's bound to create energy, bound to be something we enjoy doing, that's bound to

be something that once we've actually made it here, (we may think: "Hum, ..., got to go away ...",) but once we're actually here and here for the duration, then we spend the time, we're delighted to see one another, delighted to listen and catch up, and therefore share the stories. Because of that energy that's bound, therefore, to sustain us, to reinvigorate us and we pray, please God, re-envision us. There is also the input which, we hope will contribute to that work which goes on with us all.

When I was reflecting before, and where I want to start now, is with that theme of worship and our own prayer. Because unless it's all rooted in God then there is nothing to share, no stories from us, no Creation itself, no life-force within us, no connections that we can make, both with our stories and with other people's stories or our stories and God's story.

Those words that we use from the Confirmation Service out of Isaiah Chapter 43: "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you*", says God to us. "*I have called you by name, You are mine*".

Amazing words. And an amazing reality for us to celebrate and always go back to. It is our bedrock; we are loved; we are accepted, we are known; we are created; we are made...we are forgiven.

Kathy and I were away on Sunday, I was preaching away from home at Oxford and over dinner, the person sitting next to Kathy said, with what seemed to us rather studied political correctness: "Who are your children?" - not what children have you got or what are your children's names. Kathy was tempted with all sorts of responses as to "who" they are! I won't tell you how the conversation went (!), but part of the reality about who we are is that we are loved and forgiven. And unless that figures in our own perception and awareness of ourselves - then actually we've missed the plot, we've missed the point because the deepest truth about us is that we are loved and forgiven. It is only out of that source and that rooting that anything else can flow - and a great deal does.

I want to explore two themes that flow from that: one is that we obviously do have a story to tell because we are loved, because we are given life, given existence, given being and relationships. Secondly, that we can take risks: we're allowed to get it wrong, we allowed to muck it up, we are allowed to make mistakes. It may not be encouraged but it is allowed, it is permitted! We are bound to get things wrong when we try it out, when we try and live in that creative way of God, when we go forward into His known but our unknown. Unless we make mistakes then we are probably not moving forward. So actually the making of mistakes really matters. And I want to say a bit more about that later on.

Implicit is not enough

So, the story to tell: one of the things which has struck me strongly in the four years that I have been here in the Diocese is that there is still, for us, in our part of the world (and I think it is true in other parts of England as well) there is still a sense that to be English, to live in a village, to have your previous generations live in a village, also means you go to the church. You may say that is still residual in some places, stronger in others, but there is still the sense of it being implicit within the experience at least of many of the people who live in our villages and some the people who live in our towns. And part of the theme that we need, all of us, to work on and be much clearer about and seek to transform is that being implicit is not enough. I suspect that it never has been, but it is

far more evident today that it is not enough. There are times when we have to be explicit and know that we need to be explicit and be able to be explicit about our story and our faith and about the reality of us being loved and forgiven. If we are going to be explicit, then of course we need to know our story. That may sound very basic and very obvious. As indeed it is. But how much do we encourage people to reflect on their story, to be able to articulate their own story?

Know your own story

One of the things that still strikes me as extraordinary and, in a way I am grateful that it still strikes me as extraordinary and that I don't just find myself thinking: "Ah well, that's the Church of England for you ..." but it is extraordinary that you can have a group of people give up their time, who turn out of bed and may get up early on Sunday mornings, go to church and worship together and NEVER talk to each other about what they are doing, or about their faith, or even more about God. Extraordinary that we can have an activity that we do together, but we don't actually talk about doing together! If we transpose that to another area: if people went to a football match together, or a gardening club or film club together we would think it bizarre if that they never talk about the football or the gardening or the film! And yet somehow we accept that this is the way it is when people come to church. And somehow we end up talking about other things afterwards. And those things are important too and those are part of their faith, part of relating, part of God. Yes. But when there is no explicit speaking about God, or any explicit conversation or any reaction at all, other than "Nice sermon, Vicar" (if you even get that!), then you wonder, don't you! You think well, doesn't this matter to us? Aren't we prepared to speak about it? Isn't it actually something in our hearts or alive for us or an issue for us? We have a culture which seems to accept as normal what is actually abnormal. At least, I think it is abnormal. In any other walk of life it's abnormal. But somehow within our congregations, we seem to accept that we don't speak very much about God, and when people do talk, they talk about "the Church" or "Christianity" - but not about God. And yet it is about God and for God that we hunger. And we need, it seems to me, to be better, not just at knowing our story but being explicit about it and being emboldened to speak about God and not just the Church.

You ask someone about their faith and they'll tell you to which denomination they belong or that they are a Christian - but won't speak about God. Yet, this is what we need to learn to be better at as we tell our own stories. And that means we need to know them, we need to know our stories, we need to know what matters, we need to be empowered, back to our prayer, back to our spirituality, back to our reading of the Scriptures; back to our knowing which of the bits of the passages of the Scriptures really speak to you.

What is Good News for you?

If you had to put it in one verse, or one sentence or one phrase, whether it's in the Scriptures or not, what would it be?

What really impassions you?

What is the heart for you of your vision, awareness, experience of God?

And do you share it? Do we share it? And if we don't share it with each other, then there is even less chance that we share it with those in the life outside the Church!

Learn to tell your story

So part of what, I think, we all need to be better at doing is speaking about these things to other people, learning to tell our stories. To speak to others within the congregations where it is "safer" and as it were easier to do, because if we can't even do it there, then

there we are much less likely to do it outside the congregations, outside the boundaries, the limitations, the experiences of relating with other people of faith.

And that means we need a context in which to do it. Well, after Church could be a context, (depends how big the congregation is) it depends how quickly people move away or have other things to move onto. But there is, I think, a need for most of us, for all of us I would say, to be part of a small group, where this is possible. The small group may be the congregation, but if so it needs to be an attitude within that small group congregation, where faith is spoken about.

Some congregations do this in place of a sermon, they break the word and share and reflect together or perhaps share with their intercessions - at least these are steps along that path.

If we can't do it in a small congregation we need a small context and group where we can speak about God, can speak about faith, can speak about the issues and can speak about where "the shoe pinches", what the issues are within our own lives and how they relate back to our faith and how our faith in its turn shapes and informs and influences and guides those.

If there is no context where we are encouraged to do this, then we stay all too easily locked away, internally, and go back to our English default position: "Oh, religion is a private matter, religion is something implicit, religion is something we don't speak about." And if we are going to learn to be bolder - then we've also got to learn to articulate and speak of our faith.

So, a challenge I think for all of us to be part of a small group context where we are encouraged, enabled to speak about God, to speak about faith with other people and encourage them in that task as well.

Learn to tell others

That then brings us to being able, or at least being a little bit closer to being able, to speak of faith, to speak of God, to other people. There is a part in the Baptism and Confirmation service where those to be baptised or confirmed are asked the question: "Are you ready, with your own mouth and from your own heart to affirm your faith in Jesus Christ?"

And as you know the candidates reply "I am". They respond "I am" because the Service Booklet tells them to!!!

"Are you ready with your own heart and your own mouth? "

The Rubrics, if you look at those, tell us: "*At that point, testimony may follow*". Now, I don't know how many churches in this Diocese there are where testimony ever does follow, but perhaps something you could take away from here is to reflect whether or not testimony should follow, certainly could follow. I can tell you from personal experience that it is immensely moving when one of the young people or adults does speak about their faith at that point in the service, saying about why they want to be confirmed, why they want to be baptized, how they have got there in their faith journey.

Bishop Michael and I ask candidates before Confirmation to write a mini spiritual autobiography (we don't call it that, but that is what it is really) something of the journey of their own discipleship, what's brought them to this point in their lives? Why now? Why are you being confirmed at all? How have you got here? They write immensely movingly, most of them. It almost brings tears to your eyes reading the struggles, the

journey. Why now? And what God's been up to and how other people have helped them along that way. To get some of them to speak of their faith to the rest of the congregation can be faith transforming. I can tell you that however "badly" they do it, the rest of the congregation will applaud because they are so grateful and so appreciative that they have tried and done it at all and so full of admiration that they have had the courage to stand up there and speak of things of their hearts. Even when they do it so falteringly - it is still moving. It still helps. It still encourages. It is the kind of simple thing that we are able to do, and we don't just have to do it on those special occasions, it can be at other times too.

That, I know, can feel very un-Anglican but it can help make a connection with the formality of our liturgy, even when it is done informally and warmly, and people's own discipleship and faith journey. I would encourage us to reflect and look at some ways in which we can do this. And if you want help with this, speak to the four Tanzanians in the front row! It is part of what we have to learn from you all, because you are so much better at doing it than we are as part of the Anglican family and part of the Anglican Communion.

I am always encouraged as well, (we have the theme of the Feeding of the Five Thousand running throughout the Conference); I am always encouraged by the young lad who brings his five barley loaves and two fishes. I always imagine the cynical adults: "Hhmm, who does he think he is, what good does he think that will be, how inadequate an offering that is ..."

As of course they were right! What is that amongst so many – and yet ...God!

God acts.

God takes.

God takes the inadequate offering that we make (and is there any other sort of offering that you and I can make?). God takes my inadequate offering, your inadequate offering and, please God, He blesses it, breaks it, shares it and does things through it, beyond it, far beyond our imagining.

But we have to take the step, however inadequate we know it to be.

Confidence

And that needs our confidence - and confidence comes from the word *con-fidere*, to have faith. And confidence is from God, Gift of Faith: back to our being rooted in Him, back to our being emboldened.

Kathy and I were speaking the other evening with somebody who (some of you who know him, are probably about to guess who it is, as I speak about him!) and he was being interviewed on national radio about church buildings and the interviewer began the interview, he told us, rather aggressively, he thought:

"Well, why do you want to save these buildings because we don't need them anymore, nobody wants to go to them and nobody uses them ..."

Not quite the question he had been told to expect nor the direction of the interview. He was rather surprised to hear himself say "But I am a Christian ..." and speak about his faith and defend his faith.

Now, maybe he would always have done that, but I think partly what is happening in our culture because we are under challenge like that, it is actually making us bolder and if so, I welcome that boldness that comes, even if I do not welcome the groundswell of the challenge and if that is the consequence and the fruit, then it is not all loss.

And the emboldening is to do also with our confidence and the language at the end of the Epistles to the Thessalonians:

"The One who calls you is faithful. He will do it "

We can rely on God. And not in the false way of relying on Him because we haven't done our own homework or even done the bits we could have done, but relying on Him in the sense that the words will be given, that we can trust Him, knowing where we belong, in whom we belong, with whom we belong, where we are rooted and therefore being empowered to be bolder.

Within our post-modern or post-post-modern culture, spirituality of course takes a much higher profile than it used to. And spirituality is very well adapted to post modernism because it is private, it's individualistic, it's supermarket mentality of pick-and-mix (or lends itself to that, or can) and it is much more attractive to an age that wants to focus on that fragmentation of society than "religion" which involves something corporate, relating and even a word, that is very old fashioned, like "duty". And we have to help make the connections with the spirituality and the consequences therefore of being loved and forgiven, of journey and discipleship and relationship that are there within the spirituality itself, so that the false dichotomy, the false separation, the false distinction between spirituality and religion which so many take uncritically and unthinkingly, we, at least, can point connections to and show how the one relates to the other and indeed how they need one another.

Connections

And that brings us, it seem to me always, to part of the role that we have of making connections with other people. Everyone, I believe, has experience in some form or other of God.

Made by Him,

Made to marvel,

Made to wonder,

Made to aspire,

Made to have vision,

Given hope,

Given joys and sorrows and pains,

Given experiences beyond us.

All of us touched by those things in some way or other, some degree or other, some time or other.

But, no longer having the vocabulary within our own language readily to speak of God, readily to make the connection between the experiences that are of God and the journey of faith, the spirituality and the religion, our own Christian insight. And that connection needs to go on, otherwise understanding the experience, delighting in the experience, growing from the experience, those things may be lost if the connection isn't there.

Words actually do matter to us.

If we had never learned vocabulary then our thinking wouldn't cease, but it would be extraordinarily stunted and restricted. Words matter to the way we think, the way we understand, the way we grow, not just intellectually but with the rest of our being as well. And so the connections matter. And we, the people of faith, know the connections, we know it in our own experience and we can spot the connections in other people's experience as we hear their stories and as we look with them, listen to them and hear what it is that they are saying and hear it in their words and try to hear behind the words what the experience actually is. And it is not always the way it might seem.

When I was a parish priest in High Wycombe, I chaired the founding group of CRUSE, the group which works with the bereaved, and I remember working with a group from one of the churches who wanted to work with the bereaved and doing a training course with them and was asking them at one point:

“What do you think is the Good News for someone who has been bereaved?”

And they came up with obvious comments about Jesus being the Resurrection and the Life and we explored that and other themes that they mentioned. And I pointed out a little bit later that no one had mentioned the words of Jesus on the Cross:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And they looked a little puzzled to start with and then reflected that at some point, for some people, at some stage in their bereavement that also is Good News. Jesus has been there ahead of us, He has plumbed the depths, He knows the separation, knows the pain, knows the anguish, knows the hurts and the darkness.

And connections come in lots of ways, at lots of points: the depths of joys and the depths of sorrows; the slight joys and the slight sorrows; the sense of hope, the sense of bewilderment and failure. Wherever it is, there are the connections. And that is why we need to know our own story and listen to other peoples' stories. We need to hear behind the words, we need to care what is going on behind the words and not just hear the words in our own way and assume that what we would mean by the words is what they mean by the words, when they so often don't. And therefore that need for sensitivity, that need for that double-listening to the other person and the listening to God to see if there is anything at all else that we can contribute, which there may not be, but there may be.

And we need, it seems to me, to learn to be a little bolder than most of us naturally are, about risking making the connection, risking what we say, risking speaking up and speaking out. And there will be lots of opportunities for that in the workshops that are going on in the next few days. They'll make the connections, as we have heard already with the creative ways of the poetry, the music, the sculpture, all the art, the singing and all the other parts that are there within the workshop themes.

Living the Gospel

And lest you think, as maybe some of you are, that I am focusing too much on words and not enough on just the being of the Christian, let me just say, perhaps, the obvious thing in terms of St Francis' words about proclaiming the Gospel and using words if you have to. Of course that is profound and of course that is deep. Certainly in our village life where people know each other so well and know what goes on so much behind our doors, and outside them, if there isn't the integrity of what goes on in our 'lived' day by day existence and life, the integrity between that and our attendance at worship on Sundays or what we say, then of course the whole thing is discredited. Of course there is the integrity needed, the integration needed. Of course, there is the action needed, the being needed, who we are, but that is loved and forgiven, that is what is fundamental and that itself speaks out - yes. But in a culture that has lost religious vocabulary, in a culture that is increasingly focused on spirituality and not religion, in a culture that is so individualistic and 'pick and mix' and relativistic, in a culture that no longer can identify experiences of God as experiences of God, the need for words is greater than it was because if they are not learnt in families, if they are not learnt in schools, if they are not learnt in friendships around, then they risk not being learnt. I say risk, because God will

always break through in some way or other. But He may break through with you. He may break through with your connection. He may break through through a need, your words, your pointer, your understanding of this other person. The connections, therefore, that are there partly through the way you live but also through how you speak about the way you live are vital.

The Book of Ruth and the swing of the pendulum

Many of us, if we were in church on Sunday evening, will have heard the passage from the Book of Ruth, chapter two. It is the only part that was being read on Sunday evenings and it is a sadness to me that it did not begin about five or six verses earlier with those extraordinary words of Ruth. I was reflecting when I was preaching about this that if you want to find a book in the Old Testament that is against or completely, it seems to me, the opposite end of our post-modern culture, then the book of Ruth would be a very good candidate for that. You could hardly have something that speaks so against the swing and the culture and the trend of our own age. And I remember being taught when I was taught to preach, that part of the job of a preacher is to preach against the swing of the pendulum. It is a basic law of physics that the pendulum is at it's fastest and therefore at its shortest time in the mid-point. People rather assume that the mid-point of the pendulum is where people live or could ever be. But that is the quickest. When I was saying this, one of the choirboys was sitting there going like this with his fingers, working it out that it is actually fastest in the middle. And it is, of course, stationary at both ends, both extremes. The pendulum stops and spends most time at the extremes. It is always going to. And part of our task, it seems to me, is to preach against the pendulum swings, not maybe all the time but some of the time because, insofar as there are truths in each extreme, when you are at the extreme, you see the truths at your end, not the other end. But those are truths as well, truths of who God is, and truths that we mustn't lose sight of. To take a very obvious kind of case, we've so much within our use of buildings, we've moved away from the eastward facing, architectural purpose and logic of the buildings that we inhabit. The architecture was so much built, it seems to me, for the priest kneeling at the prayer of humble access; kneeling facing upward and outwards to God out there and beyond. Kneeling in front of and at the head of his people. That was what the building was designed for. And that is the whole sense of the transcendence, there within the architecture and there within one way of doing our liturgy. But when we emphasise the transcendence so much, we can forget the imminence of God. If by contrast – and we don't have many examples in this Diocese - you worship in a church that is semi-circular or in the round with the altar much more in the middle, and everybody gathered round and facing inwards, then there is much more the sense of God among us, Christ here, the Spirit is with us and the sense therefore that imminence of God, known in relationship, known in one another, speaking through us, His people. But of course, the transcendence is still true. Whichever we find ourselves drawn to, we need to be reminded that the other is truth as well, not "either/or" always "both/and". Hence that need to preach and to teach, to keep our focus and our attention in part upon the swing of the pendulum – the other end. And Ruth represents so much of the other end, it seems to me, for our culture and our age, so full of that sense of tenderness, duty, sacrifice, love, simplicity, that one person committing herself to the life of the other. It goes against all those mother-in-law jokes, that's for sure!

"Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people. You're God, my God".

Not the kind of comment of contemporary woman or man, not easily anyway.

And yet, a comment about who our God is, what He is like, of His faithfulness because so much of the book of Ruth is about that faithfulness. And that faithfulness that is of God, and therefore blessed by God, because it comes from God and returns to God.

Risking failing

I mentioned at the beginning, not only the telling of our stories, but the need for us to take risks and the need for us to risk failing. We are permitted by God to take risks. I always think the whole incarnation is risk. The whole invitation we saw of the Fra Angelico Annunciation, the whole invitation to Mary. Could she have said 'No'? Well, yes, she might have said 'No'. Within God's foreknowledge perhaps He knew she wouldn't, but she might have done. And it has to be risk – love always has to be risk because it leaves the choice, the responsibility with the other – always. And always, creation, love, relating, coming to a conference, is all risk, it is bound to be. We don't actually know, and we can't. And given that our God is the One who goes before us, and calls us onwards, the whole sense of pilgrimage, discipleship, journeying everything, traveling, going on, takes us always into the part that for us is unknown, there will always be ways in which we muck it up, always be ways in which we get it wrong. There are bound to be, but we know what to do with the wrongness, we know to whom to take it. That is not to be used as an excuse. That is not meaning, therefore, that we don't have to bother, that we don't have to try to get it right because it can be forgiven anyway, but rather it is saying that even with the trying, even with that openness to God, even with that sense of dependence on Him, with his directing in prayer, that reliance upon the advice, support, fellowship of the rest of the body, other people, even so we can still get it wrong and still do.

When I was at Theological College, the Chaplain at the College at the time was Jim Thompson who later became Bishop of Stepney and then Bishop of Bath and Wells and who tragically died a few years ago. And I remember particularly one of Jim's sermons. He preached a most extraordinary sermon, it was all about an allegory about mountain climbing. He spoke about going up a likely route, going up a mountain, and going up a path that looked attractive and got more and more difficult and more and more of a chimney until he realized that actually it was a no-go area and he had to turn around and came back down. He was emphasising the need for us to recognise when we've made mistakes and turn round and come back and follow another path.

And that was a really important lesson for all of us I think, that he could say, as we could all say, that we have taken wrong turnings. They seemed right at the time and now, under God, we recognize that they may not have been, that they lead nowhere. And the sense I had that the path that he was talking about was, what seemed to me to be the Wilderness Club, that you needed to show your own sense of having been in a wilderness or being in a wilderness, to have any sense of credibility before God and there was that rather a strong theme at that time within the College, or so it seemed to me.

But the point is that we will make mistakes, all of us, we will take paths which are dead ends. We will take steps that don't work. We will try things out. And I think another challenge from me this evening is for us to reflect on what mistakes we together have made in our own parishes, benefices and deaneries, and us in the diocese. It is important that we have made them. If we haven't, then we have stayed in our comfort zone almost certainly and not risked! We have not risked trying things, some of which won't work, then we haven't risked finding what will work. If we only, take steps that we

are 100% certain are going to be right, then actually we are wrong, because that means we won't be moving forward, we will be moving backwards because we will stay as we are, and be stationary because there is never that certainty. If we stay as we are, everything else will have moved on beyond us and left us isolated, stranded, beached, which is itself wrong. So we are actually committed to making mistakes! We are bound to make mistakes, we are bound to get things wrong. That is actually part of the calling if you like, because it is the inevitability of the choices that we make that some won't work and the inevitability, therefore, that if we are trying to discern God's path, because we have our own fallible, limited human sight and knowledge, there are no guarantees, no certainties. And however much, please God, under the guidance of His Spirit, its right choices, sometimes it won't be. Lots of things get tried out, some of which work and in that sense are blessed and good, and other things don't and that is all right. We need to be able to say that is all right and try something else – move on, risk it. And let ourselves look together again for the next path that God is calling us on.

It may be that you try out new service times. (How many times do congregations seem to want to change service times!) It may be rather more creative things and exciting things in terms of new family worship or maybe in terms of study groups or prayer groups or maybe we try a contemplative prayer group. Or maybe we look to stop meetings for a month in order for people, maybe through Lent, to do more engaging with their own village, or with their village communities in village groups or other groups outside the life of the church. Or maybe it is the young people's group or the young people's club that we try and we don't get the recipe right or we don't find a way of actually engaging with those youngsters.

Or maybe we try a service in the village hall, or the school hall or the church hall rather than in the church buildings and see whether that works. And maybe it is visiting people in the streets so that we can invite them to make suggestions for our own prayers within the body of the church.

So many different things. Maybe it is healing services that you have not tried or have tried, or have tried and need to adjust the way in which you do it, the way in which you speak about the healing that God gives and that He empowers His church to live out and express, not just in forgiveness but with the laying on of hands or anointing.

But unless we try these things, we don't know the path that God is actually calling us on. Sometimes it is clear at the outset, but so often it isn't and that is why the risks matter; that is why it matters that we know it is all right to get it wrong; that it is all right to say: "Well we tried that, but it was a dead-end, or not the right time or not the right way" and alter it, adjust it, look elsewhere, change, develop. Because that's how God leads us and that is where He takes us, in new paths as He always will.

Continuing our waiting on God and His guidance

We hope there won't be too many mistakes within the Conference as a whole, but if there are, that will be part of what we've tried, what the Planning Group has tried and has not worked. But we are here to continue that waiting on God, to continue, as has been stressed to us already, that theme of worship that, that has already been lived, already been expressed by us. Continue with that fundamental waiting on God and experience of Him. Knowing that unless we are rooted in Him, spending time with Him, being with Him, listening, listening in prayer, to the Scriptures in the breaking of bread with one another – then we miss the point of our being loved and forgiven and we miss

the point of our own story to share and how it connects with God's story and one another. Without that waiting on God, we won't be emboldened and be able to be more explicit as witnesses when we need to be.

Fini