



Monmouth Diocesan Conference 2021

## **Imagination exercise**

*Imagination creates reality.*

In his essay, *The Critic as Artist*, Oscar Wilde declares, "Yes: I am a dreamer. For a dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world."

To see the dawn before the rest of the world: to dream.

Imagination, surely, is a gift from God. As Christians, it is imagination that gives us the power to see the poor clothed in holy raiment. To equate the slum to a New Jerusalem. To elevate the least amongst us to the greatest. It is imagination that inspires us to live the alternative reality of the Kingdom of God within the present world order faithfully.

To be without imagination, is to be without hope. And because Jesus Christ has opened the door to Heaven for us by his death and resurrection, hope abounds.

Imagination is stronger than knowledge. Dreams more powerful than facts. Hope more triumphant than experience. And faith, and truth, and love, more life-giving and more affirming than any earthly power.

In our worship this morning, we heard the following refrain: "To the lost Christ shows his face, to the unloved he gives his embrace, to those who cry in pain or disgrace, Christ makes with his friends a touching place." And in our conversations, about discipleship, stewardship, equality and diversity, social justice, and sustainability, we have been called to reflect upon the tender nature of Jesus' compassionate touch in

our diocese and then to ask: where are we in relation to his scandalous embrace? And how might we become a touching place for those who feel unloved and in pain today? Imagination, surely, is a gift from God. Friends, what might we imagine for our diocese?

### **The exercise**

In this imagination exercise, we invite you to dream about the future of our diocese. You will be in good company, of course. The biblical dreamers, like Daniel, saw their world not as it was but, by the grace of God, as it could be. Seeing beyond the present moment, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, changed hearts – even the heart of a king!

“I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel:

For he is the living God,  
enduring forever.  
His kingdom shall never be destroyed,  
and his dominion has no end.” (Daniel 6:26, NRSV)

In our imagination and in our dreaming, might we grow the kingdom of the living God in every corner of our diocese.

So, sit comfortably for a moment. Take time to regulate your breathing – first in, and then out. Allow the sounds around you to wash over you. And enjoy this moment of stillness.

[You may wish to close your eyes for a short while.]

Imagine yourself looking at a desk calendar with today's date being shown. Watch the pages flip from today, to tomorrow, to the next day. Then to the next month, and the next, and then to the next year, and the next, until we arrive at the year 2030.

Imagine that you look up from your desk and you find yourself in an auditorium in which someone is speaking and announcing an award. You realise that the person speaking is the next Archbishop of Wales and the award is the ‘Diocese of the Year’.

The Archbishop says, ‘At no time in the history of the award until now have the judges been in unanimous agreement of the diocese most deserving of this award. And this year the award goes to... Monmouth!’

There is a standing ovation, as people get out of their chairs to applaud. When the applause dies down, the Archbishop goes on to list all the accomplishments that made this diocese deserving. ***Imagine what the Archbishop is saying.***

A short film starts. It features a number of parishioners from the diocese in a focus group and one parishioner says, 'The thing that is great about the Diocese of Monmouth is...' ***Imagine what the person says.***

Bishop Cherry gets up to accept the award and explains that, in 2021, the diocesan conference came together to begin to develop a vision that has resulted in this award. Bishop Cherry explains a number of things that were done in the preceding years. ***Imagine what Bishop Cherry says we did as diocese.***

As you are leaving you overhear a group of parishioners. They begin talking about what it feels like to worship in the Diocese of Monmouth and how the changes in the past decade have improved their lives. ***Imagine what they are saying. How does it feel to worship here?***

[Open your eyes and pick up a pen so that you can note down some ideas.]

As you imagine going back to your desk, you sit down and want to record some of the things you heard:

**What was it that the Archbishop said?**

**Why did the Diocese of Monmouth deserve the award?**

**What was it that Bishop Cherry said was done to bring about these changes?**

**What did the parishioners say about worshipping here?**

You will now return to your breakout rooms to discuss your ideas. Share your dreams for our diocese – what is it that will make us stand out in ten years from now? Where will we be in relation to Jesus' scandalous embrace? Try and be specific – for imagination creates reality.

[15 minute discussion]

Thank you for sharing your dreams for growing the kingdom in the diocese.

To close, from Shel Silverstein:

"If you are a dreamer, come in  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar  
A hoper, a pray-er, a magic-bean-buyer  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire  
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin  
Come in!  
Come in!"

And so we pray: O Christ, forgive what I have not felt; and so enlarge my heart that I never shrink from contact with your loved ones rejected by the world. Instead, teach me to care rightly, and to dream rightly, in your name.

*Amen.*