

I want to start with a series of thank-yous and with the usual caveat that I cannot name everybody for fear of omission: those who I do miss out please be assured it is purely because of post-move brain fog and not deliberate. Firstly thank you to Canon John Paul and Robert Beattie who, with others, have put together this service and put up with many competing voices and demands, thank you to the Head Verger and his team for the preparations and organisation, the Guild of Bellringers, the Flower Guild and the Director of Music, musicians, and choirs for beautiful music so near the start of term.

The anthem which the Voluntary Choir sang earlier might seem a strange choice in terms of words but I sang it and enjoyed it as a chorister myself in the 1980s and the line, 'When the house doth sigh and weep' reminds me of settling into the Deanery and giving thanks for all working so hard to get it ready.

To the Friends of Worcester Cathedral for the refreshments we shall enjoy in College Hall after this service, thank you; to my residentiary canon colleagues, Canon Hoskins and Canon Bohan whose insistence, together with Bishop John, that I take off a good period of time beforehand has been much appreciated. I owe them and thank them for their friendship and support. And finally to Tony and Jorja for sharing life at No. 2 and No. 10, thank you.

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Why do you want to be a dean? It is a good question asked by many people over the past few months, though interestingly not a question asked directly either by the application process or the interview panel. I have been reminded recently that I am on record as saying that I had no interest in being a dean, and even more intriguing I said, a number of years ago that I had no interest in ministry in a cathedral.

Welcome to your new dean.

I should clarify that I am not a reluctant dean, nor an unwilling dean, but I am surprised – for all the right reasons – and so delighted and excited to be the 47<sup>th</sup> dean of Worcester. I could not be happier.

I think that my reason for my denial of cathedral ministry was shaped by my earliest vocational call – to be a vicar; to be a parson, to be a parish priest. I had a vision, even as a teenager, of being a vicar of a country village where, after divine service I would be seen sat at the bar of the village pub enjoying a pint. I shall return to this image later.

What I have discovered and enjoyed so much over the past five years here at Worcester is that it is possible to be vicar-like, a pastor, in a cathedral and that the diversity of event and experience in this place has allowed me, especially in the breadth of my previous role, to be a priest in much the same way as in a parish: pastoral care, worship, community, friendship, and discipleship.

As dean the pastoral care of the cathedral community is a priority of which we were reminded when the bishop handed me the deed saying, *receive this cure of souls which is both yours and mine*. Remembering the priestliness of the role of dean is paramount and easily lost in the breadth of responsibilities and competing demands.

Wanting to be a vicar from an early age, possibly eight or even younger, I have always loved church buildings and cathedrals especially. On Saturdays when as a family we shopped in Chester, I would spend most of the time in the cathedral or the SPCK bookshop next door. When other school friends spent work experience in factories, offices and shops, I was fortunate to spend two weeks with the vergers of Chester Cathedral and learned what keeps cathedrals going.

Cathedrals often have the advantage over most churches in having many hidden chapels and spaces, paths to encourage meandering and exploration, guides and signs and memorials and artefacts which throw as many questions in the air as they do provide answers. To visit a cathedral is to visit an architectural gem which holds safe the hopes and dreams, sorrows, cries, and love of unnumbered generations. Place, space and architecture I shall, like the pub I mentioned earlier, return to.

In the past year this cathedral, like many others, has been host to a wider selection of concerts and events than perhaps previously known. Abba by candlelight and a variety of pop, rock, and dance concerts have taken their place alongside the Three Choirs, the Worcester Festival Choral Society, and an excellent programme of classical and church music. What should and should not take place in a consecrated space, and what ought and ought not to be a driving force in decision making has been rigorously questioned and challenged. In doing so, this whole area has, I believe, been beautifully opened up so that we fill these glorious spaces with people experiencing something different.

Opinions differ on what can happen in sacred space, and we look to the past for support of what might happen and how we approach things: exploring the intersection of contemporary values with traditional spaces is nothing new for the church, in fact it is what lies at the heart of practical theology. Proclaiming the gospel afresh in every generation requires ingenuity and an ability to see potential in new adventures. And yes in a worrying financial climate, money matters but opening up the cathedral is part of our evangelism and that means opening up to new things: concerts and silent discos, light shows and, of course, as we did last year, dogs. Like beer and architecture, dogs I shall return to.

As often as I have been asked, *why do you want to be a dean?* so I have been asked *what I am going to do?* or, perhaps more intriguingly, *what am I going to do differently? What is my vision for Worcester Cathedral?* Those of us who are part of the cathedral community know that we have a vision statement which we are already well on the way with; a vision which, with perfect timing, is due to be reviewed and revised in 2025. So I do not wish, nor would it be wise, to change that vision but together I look forward to renewing this alongside the diocesan vision for transformation and change.

For the press release about my appointment I was asked for a few words for the blurb about who I am for those who do not know me. Usually such information contains hobbies as well as family, education and sporting achievements. Of sporting achievements I have none but hobbies I gave three – and these were quoted and shared widely. The Association of English Cathedrals picked up on these and headlined their socials with: *"Architecture, ale and a love of dogs!" He's our kind of Dean.*

As a short description of my character it says enough if not all and I was delighted that a friend saw that headline and has had it engraved on a pint pot as a kind gift and reminder of who I am.

So if I must be drawn on my vision for the cathedral during the time of my decanal years, I want not to be specific but to pray that they will be shaped by the character of architecture, ale, and a love of dogs.

Architecture: I spoke earlier of my love of cathedrals for their encouragement to wander and explore, to think, to inspire, to ask questions. This was my first love of cathedrals and remains so each time I enter this building. I long for others to experience the thrill and the awe, the safety as well as the gentle provocation which this tent of faith holds so dearly for the city and region. Our learning team have an aim of every child in the county visiting the cathedral during their school career, and I would hope to extend that goal to every person in this city (and even beyond) stepping foot inside this hold place: a gate wide enough to welcome and invite, to honour and to love.

There is always a danger in being misquoted when it comes to beer so I should say that non-alcoholic alternatives are available, but a love of ales is not merely about the drink, but as I mentioned earlier, the image of hospitality, accessible conversation, friendship, relational openness which speaks of the love of Jesus Christ. The rich variety of uses of this building often compete for attention and time but we are first and foremost and always a church – a place of prayer and worship. Just as this shapes our mission and ministry, so it must also shape our learning, our events, concerts, exhibitions, staff teams, volunteers – all that we do comes from our love for Jesus Christ and a desire to see his Kingdom grow.

My childhood vision of me as a parson in a pub with a pint is a model of priestly ministry which may not suit all, but a call to be a priest is my first call as a Dean and I pray that we can *all* minister well in this place. We must be unashamedly evangelistic – not to exclude those of no faith but to shine like stars, to share the good gifts of our Heavenly Father and to encourage all to seek him seek him seek him.

And finally a love of dogs: I shouldn't need to unpack this one as I am sure even the extreme cat lovers understand the perfection of dogs and their love and joy, but the gospel reading we heard earlier has a throwaway line which I always feel needs to be challenged.

*Do not give what is holy to dogs*, may be based on a cultural prejudice but what if we do give what is holy to dogs? They enjoy whatever it is by simply being themselves. Holiness is not a fragile glass or an untouchable artefact in a museum. It is a strong and strengthening presence of the divine, it is – like God from whom all things holy come – all powerful, almighty, and ours for our use. Let us dare, let us dream to dare, let us radically offer welcome and love to all, blurring the artificial line between sacred and secular.

Let our ministry, our vision, our life be directed by the words of Christ: 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.' Thanks be to God.