

## **Welcare 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service: Southwark Cathedral.**

**15<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” (Jn 21.17)

It is a very great pleasure to be with you on this day of celebration. Five years ago I stood in this pulpit at a similar service marking a hundred and twenty years of Welcare, and it is right and fitting to rejoice in these milestones.

In the Diocese of Southwark we have for the last couple of years been speaking of our shared Vision in terms of Walking, Welcoming and Growing. The Christian life is a journey, on which we help each other along, bear one another’s burdens, and raise a cheer when we cross over one of the high mountain passes and see the new terrain that opens up before us.

We walk with Jesus, led by the Spirit, loving God. And we walk together. It has been a great privilege to walk these years side by side with Welcare, and it will be a joy to continue as we journey forward. We journey together, moreover, in a worldwide fellowship. Earlier this morning it was a very great pleasure to welcome the Dean of Delhi and later today I hope to be meeting the Bishop of Delhi, The Rt Revd Warris K. Masih. He is visiting this country along with some of his colleagues, as I was privileged to visit North India earlier this year with a Pilgrimage made up of Readers and members of our Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns Committees.

Such exchanges knit us together, and I know that Bishop Warris will be glad to learn more of what Welcare does, and of its history, knowing that many of the issues with which Welcare grapples will be of present concern to him in Delhi and throughout India. Indeed the concern for social justice and taking God's love to the marginalised was at the heart of the projects and parishes we visited in February. We are all in this together and our Christian faith commits us to justice for all people.

When we celebrated the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary five years ago, I spoke at some length about history, recalling that it was in 1894 that the Bishop of Rochester (my predecessor, for there was no Diocese of Southwark until 1905 when the 100<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Rochester became the first Bishop of Southwark) established, in partnership with his wife, Edith Davidson, the Diocesan Association for the Care of Friendless Girls, an organisation which, through several changes of name and additions of responsibility has come down to us today as Welcare.

Today I want to focus on the spirit in which we pursue our future hope. We build on the foundations of the past and we look always to the future; but if we know where we have come from, we find it easier to know where we are going. Take the name Welcare: there may have been something quaint to the modern ear about a society committed to reaching out and caring for "friendless girls" - yet there is a core truth that is of the essence of Welcare today. In the Nineteenth Century, your "friends" were more than your social circle: they were your family and your village, everyone cared for each other long before

social welfare and services emerged. To be friendless was to be in material poverty; it was to be an outcast.

Since that time there has, thank God, built up an immense superstructure of different forms of social care tackling material poverty with great determination. For all that we often complain about it, for all that we rightly seek to reform and perfect it, and to fund it better, we do live in a welfare state that provides us with a remarkable level of material security. Nevertheless material deprivation continues to be a scourge for many and is very evident in many parts and communities across the Dioceses of Southwark and Rochester. In particular child poverty is an often partly hidden challenge. We also reflect on the far more limited provision in many other parts of the world such as the streets of Delhi.

The Gospel teaches us that material provision is only part of the story. What we must never lose sight of is community. It is in community that true long term resilience is built, in which self-reliance can be learnt or recovered, in which peace and security is to be found. We are challenged to widen our understanding of family to see our fellow humanity as our brothers and sisters and to reach out to them in love and to respond to the condition of their need generously and sacrificially.

Community is where we discover that we each have something to give. We are not divided into clients and carers, patients and doctors. Under God, all have something to give and something to receive. In community we find these gifts in ourselves, for the good of others; and as we give, we find that we receive often more than we are giving.

Today we tend not to speak in terms of “friendless girls” or “friendless boys”; yet there are many such living among us. Young people without virtuous circles of relationships, without others who put them first, without true friends who treat them not as a means for their own purposes. And many parents are themselves cut off from the warm web of interpersonal connections that make life more fulfilling.

The practical, the emotional and the spiritual are all interconnected and mutually supporting. We have read, and we shall shortly sing, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, which speaks both of green fields, quiet waters and a refreshing banquet, and also of the Lord restoring our souls. If we are to play our part in working towards this, we have to work in and by building community. Partly because that will achieve the goals: partly because that *is* the goal.

This is, it seems to me, a work in which Welcare excels and in which it has renewed its vision and purpose under the inspiring leadership of Anna Khan working well with staff, associates and volunteers, providing practical and life changing services. The strategy states Welcare’s core values as being Inclusive, Nurturing, Collaborative, and Trusted. With these values at the centre, always returning to them, Welcare marks itself out as a distinctive and valuable institution with strong Christian values that goes much beyond the provision of individual services.

This strategy with its clear focus, deriving from Christian values which are sound, clearly stated, and owned by all, is a sign of the direction Welcare has been taking with renewed purpose. When we gathered for the 120<sup>th</sup> celebration this journey of renewal was already underway but

we can see more clearly five years on the fruit that has been borne and having paid tribute to Anna, I extend my appreciation through her to all the staff and volunteers, for what has been accomplished in renewing Welcare, reimagining its values bringing them forward with dedication and commitment.

Welcare began as a pioneering organisation fired by love. Our forebears, just like the Apostle Peter by the shore of the Sea of Galilee, heard Jesus say “do you love me?” and answered “yes” - then they heard the good Lord say “feed my sheep.” And it was in opening up the green pastures and still waters to those who were scattered and lost that Welcare was born. Now, again, Welcare is called to be a pioneer. In a world increasingly governed by the practical, the measurable, and the individual, Welcare is reaching beyond into the wider world of community, standing for love in a world of numbers.

Of course, we do not part company with the practical. We are diligent and professional in getting things done, and willing to be held to account. But there is a “yet more” and it is here that God’s purposes, and the distinctive value of Welcare, come into clear focus. There are new areas of need, as there were in 1894, areas where there is a deficit of love, hope and communal belonging. And there is still, as there always has been, a pressing need for an institution that is Inclusive, Nurturing, Collaborative, and Trusted fired by Faith, Hope and Love in Jesus Christ. As we have walked together thus far, may we all, in Welcare and in the wider Diocesan Family, continue to walk and reach out into the community with compassion and love always seeking the common good, the Lord Jesus being our helper and guide. Amen.