

Digital Missioner's Synod Talk 5th March 2022

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5:24

Dear Bishop Kevin, members of Synod, guests, beloved in Christ,

Today marks the 1480th day of me being your Digital Missioner, not that anyone's counting!

The course of the last four years in following this vocation and serving the diocese have been anything but boring, predictable, and ordinary. I am blessed being surrounded by inspiring people, both clergy and lay, helping me grow in faith and grow in love for our Church. The tiny piece of Heaven we share and claim on Earth, the Scottish Episcopal Church, has become my refuge and my home. You are all my chosen family.

I doubt that my story is unique; whether cradle Episcopalian or finding Piskies as the community of last resort, after a long voyage, I believe that there is something special, ineffable and innate to being an Episcopalian that we ought to share and share abundantly with the world.

So, through all this, whither digital mission?

After four years of changing diocesan needs and requirements, of changing duties and responsibilities, I often find it challenging to describe what Digital Mission in Glasgow and Galloway is all about. Perhaps, it is easier to share what it is not.

Digital Mission is not an optional add-on. Society has changed rapidly in the past two decades, and at lightspeed over the past two years. **First impressions of churches now happen online.** Separated from friendly welcomers, heart-warming and spiritually-feeding services, and excellent tea, coffee and cake after, **the people we are trying to reach have already googled us.** This is the not-so-new digital reality, where **we have a direct responsibility to offer a fitting and accurate online representation of our church family.** Over the course of the coming year, **my focus will once again be with charges working to develop an authentic and bespoke presence through websites and social media.**

Digital Mission is not "one size fits all". Through the myriad of church connections over the past years, one thing has always been a certainty – despite all that we have in common, **our communities have individual digital needs.** I have worked to honour this fact by offering a **variety of approaches fitting to each congregation's skills, abilities,**

willingness, and circumstance. It's not always worked as intended, but we will keep on trying and trialling and nudging along. Expect to find **more resources, more events, and more stories sharing the Good News.**

Digital Mission is not performative. We live in a fragile world, where **our actions have consequences and our words have power.** When representing the Diocese online, **we have sought to create a prayerful community, working for justice and peace for all of Creation, focussed on sharing God's everlasting love with everyone.** Please know that I take this responsibility seriously - being God's hands, and feet, and voices is a tangible part of everything that we try to share online and act on offline, too. Although our contribution might seem small, it is faithful and steadfast, taking us to the margins, where we can stand with the oppressed and lift up the lowly. Our work for God's Heaven on Earth continues.

If you would indulge me, I would like to read a passage from the Lectionary for today. From the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 58, beginning at verse nine.

⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Once again, the lectionary offers something both timely and timeless, something pertinent to our experience today at Synod, on the eve of the first Sunday of Lent. The choice is ours, whether we want to wander hopelessly lost in the parched places or be like a watered garden whose waters never fail, we choose how we interact with the divine. As Bishop Kevin said earlier today during his charge to Synod: "The Prophet's vision can be made real."

When we pray and help aid efforts for Ukraine, when we visit congregations across the diocese and share lovely pictures of Bishop Kevin in a primary school or welcoming climate pilgrims, or confirming young and young at heart Christians, when we gaze at hundreds of folded angels suspended from the ceiling of a church, when we clear thousands of pieces of litter, when we share in the joy of newly instituted and ordained priests, when we put together Christmas videos with voices from across the Diocese, when we read the poetry of the Diocesan Makar, when we welcome COP representatives to the diocese, we become threads woven into God's story, a story that stretches back to death on a cross and resurrection, to a maiden's yes and a baby's cry, all the way back to "In the beginning"...

I believe that God is working in us and through us, nourishing us to face our challenges, to go and proclaim the Good News to all the world. So it is with Digital Mission, it is there to meet the needs of our communities and to share a glimpse of God's glory and grace, love, joy, compassion, all at work in us and around us.

I will share with you one more thing that Digital Mission is not.

Digital Mission is not just for Petko. I have often half-jokingly told people that my hope for the diocese is that one day my work here will be done and I will be obsolete because everyone across our congregations would feel supported and confident enough to be a Digital Missioner themselves. That's right, a Diocese full of Digital Missioners, God help us! I'm sure we can work this out with the Diocesan Treasurer.

Meanwhile, here and now, we can still work together towards that vision. Echoing the old adage from a Synod or two ago, "please get in touch". Whether it is a query about your church website, or social media, news about upcoming events or photos and videos from past ones that you wish you share with the Church, questions about the Diocesan website social media channels and our digital outreach, here I am.

If you want to talk more about what I do to understand better how I can help you and your community, or suggest ideas for digital training and events, ask for resources, inquire about photographs of your church or learn about the diocesan website and email system, here I am.

For these and hundreds more, here I am.

Call me, email me, waylay me on public transport!

I can only achieve what I do as your Digital Missioner when we work together.

Thank you.