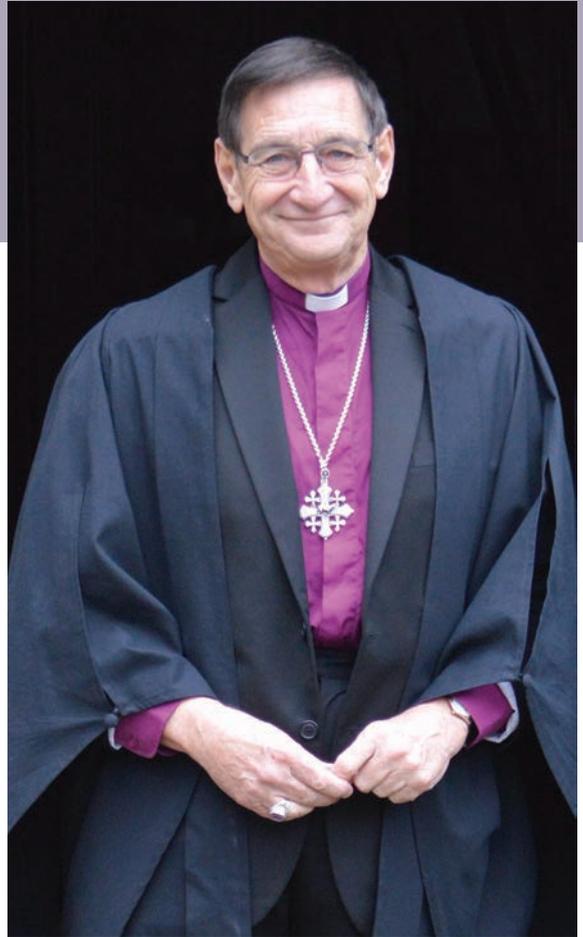


The MEANING of HOME

Bishop Michael Doe, Preacher to the Inn, reflects on what we might learn from the experience of the Coronavirus



The Inn's traditional toast is 'Domus'. Nor just a house, but a home. We are being separated from that home, and from meeting each other, by Corvid-19. The Chapel is closed, services cancelled, weddings postponed. Thinking of what it means to be 'at home' may be a focus for making some sense of what's happening and asking us where we really belong.

Our staff and those in Chambers are working from home wherever possible. That may be difficult for those whose family relationships are already under strain, and for those who live alone. It should make us grateful that we do have a home, unlike those who live in hostels or on the streets. And, as usual, we easily forget those whose home is prison, where the already over-crowded and insanitary conditions put inmates at even greater risk.

For the present we struggle on, keeping as safe as possible, and helping others where we can. Disasters like this always bring out the best in human nature: greater neighbourliness, more volunteers, and even more commitment from the health and social care staff on the front line.

The political culture has changed as well. Now all the talk is of being together and caring for the most vulnerable. But will we remember that when, please God, we come through the present darkness and out the other side? Could that be a '1945 moment' when we recognize the suffering and sacrifice we've endured, become committed to a more common life, build a new shared home? Or will we repeat what happened after our last crisis, the financial one in 2008, where the Austerity agenda meant that those who had suffered most bore the largest burden in putting it right? We certainly need to learn some lessons about properly resourcing our health and social care services.

Corvid-19 also makes us more aware of that shared home which is our planet. Globalisation has been a major contributor to the spread of this virus, but also the means by which information and research can be shared, and joint decisions made possible. The same is true of climate change, that other global threat to our survival which will still be with us when this crisis has passed. And yet international order, and the law which has undergirded

it, have been seriously undermined by inward-looking nationalisms. How do we recover that breadth of vision which arose from the embers of the last World War?

For many the effects of the Coronavirus will be deeply personal. I write this as the Church moves into Holy Week and Good Friday, remembering how in Christ God shared our suffering and our death, but also looking beyond that to the Easter promise of new life. Faced with the death of loved ones, questions about who we are and where we can ultimately be 'at home' will come into even sharper focus. In the oral tradition which became known as 'Negro Spirituals', people in slavery saw death as coming home. It's reflected in the poem 'I'm going home', which one of Dvořák's pupils set to the Largo theme in his New World symphony. You can hear it on You Tube.

Some will find consolation in that, for the future, but also for now. As St Augustine wrote, after finally finding peace at the end of a turbulent and unsatisfying life: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their home in Thee.' ■