

Messages for the Diocese from Bishop Kevin and Elspeth

Message from Bishop Kevin to the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway

Dear Friends,

I hope you are all well and that this lockdown is not too difficult for you, your families, and friends.

I am very disappointed and sad that the pandemic means that Elspeth and I have not been able to move to Glasgow and Galloway in May as was planned. As you know, the enthronement service at the cathedral was arranged for 4 July and that too has had to be postponed. I will however take over as Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway as planned on 1 July and we will move to Glasgow as soon as we possibly can. We are so sorry not to be able to meet you all face to face at the moment, and we are very much looking forward to the time when we can do so, and to visiting you all in your churches. I would like to thank everyone in the Diocese who has been so helpful and supportive thus far, especially all the office staff, the Synod Clerk, and the Diocesan Secretary, Treasurer and Surveyor.

I have often been asked what my Strategy for the Diocese and my Mission Plan is. I attach my reflections and thoughts as I move towards the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway.

After years of putting magazines together for congregations. After years of writing the Rector's letter and being told my efforts were worthy but a little dull. After years of finding theological articles of real depth and historical articles of real interest. After years I realised as I was leaving my last congregation what the choir really wanted came under the generic heading – Gossip. So here it is...

Having been born and brought up in the North East of England, Sunderland to be precise, I came to Edinburgh Theological College in 1976. My first degree was in

History at Leeds and the attraction of Edinburgh was partly to come North properly, having gone south for my first degree.

During my time at Coates Hall I did get to know a former Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, Francis Moncrieff, who was later a part of my reason for coming back to exercise ministry in Scotland. After College and the University of Edinburgh, I returned to the Diocese of Durham to serve my curacy in a mining village called Horden, at that time in the middle of the extensive Durham coalfields. I am the only member of the current College of Bishops to have been trained in and by the SEC.

Towards the end of my curacy, I was invited to become Chaplain to the University of Leeds, where one of my next-door neighbours was David Jenkins. As I was beginning to explore returning to a congregational ministry, + Richard Holloway asked me to come to Edinburgh to rescue St Salvador's Stenhouse, opposite the prison and in the middle of a social housing scheme. The

congregation and building had been established by Francis Moncrieff for whom + Richard and myself had enormous respect. Time is too short for me to tell you of the burglaries, bricks through the windows, youth drugs project and endless efforts to raise money through jumble sales, tombolas and fetes. It was all great fun and the Holy Spirit moved among us.

During my time there, I met and married Elspeth at St Salvador's. We often thank God that the congregation just allowed us to be ourselves and were never intrusive while being totally supportive, the SEC at its best.

At that time, I also became part time Diocesan Director of Ordinands for Edinburgh and then Provincial Director of Ordinands, appointed by the Primus + George Henderson. To illustrate how things have changed, I can tell you that the Primus's advice was not to put too much effort into selection and recruitment because the SEC 'is finished'. He was part of a generation who had lost confidence in the church. The situation is now the opposite as many of us realise just how rich the sacramental life of our churches is. We have confidence that God is with us, that the Holy Spirit is moving among us and we are saying by our faithfulness – we have an experience of the living God. That confidence is what I personally know, and experience and it is a confidence shared by the present College of Bishops and I believe, the Province.

Despite being Provincial Director of Ordinands and doing some, what would now be called, transitional ministry, I decided I wanted to return to having my own congregation and so I moved to St Michael and All Saints, Edinburgh. My intention always was to give up the vocational discernment work, but the Vestry were paid for my PDO time and so who would turn down a new Rector with a dowry?

Faithfulness is often interpreted as preservation, as keeping things as they always have been. My first years in the new charge were not always easy as we sought to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit in changing patterns and gender of ministry. I was probably the last Rector in SEC to have to deal with protests in the street. Fortunately, the worst was during an outdoor procession and so we just sang louder!

God is with us in so many ways we do not always realise. The years in Edinburgh, on reflection, were full of interference by the Holy Spirit. Students who were musicians

came to sing with us, then found faith with us, made their home with us. Students came from the Theological Institute, spent time with us – I often wonder what happened to Kelvin Holdsworth.....

When I arrived in the congregation there seemed a lot of elderly people and when I left sixteen years later, there seemed a lot of elderly people and a lot of younger people and children.

And I was still trying to give up vocational discernment work. The regular meetings I had with the College of Bishops on vocation, meant I gained an invaluable sense of the Province and its

potential through the Bishops and visiting every Diocese. The visiting was curtailed when I became Dean of Edinburgh but that brought new challenges and new insights into Diocesan and Provincial life.

Then on to Argyll and the Isles. Fortunately, I love the sea and have enjoyed rough crossings in choppy waters. That could be the subject of many a sermon, but it has just been a fact of life for the past decade. It has been such an exciting time working with the Diocesan officers, the clergy and all the people to make real the building of the kingdom of God with limited resources, small scattered congregations, and vast distances. This we did together because of the commitment, energy, enthusiasm and faithfulness of the clergy and laity who recognise and know that God is with us.

Having limited resources I knitted our own Mission programmes: 'Building the Vision' was like sending out a knitting pattern for a balaclava, and when we met at the Diocesan Conference Day it was inspirational and great fun seeing what could be done with a balaclava. It is a great privilege to be a bishop and to be a small part of so many congregations where the Holy Spirit moves and encourages and blesses our efforts and vision.

The privilege of being Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway is indeed a challenge, but God is with us. I ask you all to pray for me and for Elspeth as we prepare to move. If you were to ask me what I need most as I become Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway, I would say I stand most in need of God's gift of Wisdom. Please pray that God will grant me Wisdom.

May God bless and keep you

+ Kevin

And a message from Elspeth

I am looking forward very much to meeting you all, to joining you in worship and to visiting your churches. I am very sad that the Covid-19 restrictions have delayed our move to Glasgow and Galloway. I hope it will not be too long before we can move house and meet you all, even if we have to keep two metres apart!

I am also looking forward to being back in Glasgow again and to getting to know the Diocese better. I lived and worked in Glasgow for four years after finishing my PhD degree, and again for two years later in my career, and I have very happy memories of my time there. My mother was born and brought up in Helensburgh and throughout my childhood we often visited my Scottish Granny there. It will be good to be back in the West.

I was born and brought up in Durham and then went to University in Edinburgh for my first degree in Planning and my PhD which focussed on the Economic Development of the Scottish Highlands

and Islands and on strategic planning. My first job was in Strategic Planning with the City of Glasgow Council. I then moved to the Scottish Development Agency and had several roles with them, first in Glasgow in Corporate planning in Bothwell Street, then in Edinburgh in Business, setting up a regional office in the Borders and then back to Glasgow as Head of Rural Development. When I met and married Kevin, I moved to be Head of Economic Development for the City of Edinburgh Council.

I then had a big career shift as I wanted to use the skills and experience, I had gained in another area that mattered to me more personally. I was Macmillan Cancer Support's Director for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for 10 years. I then moved to my present role as Chief Operating Officer for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

As we begin to meet you all: two quirky things to tell you. Firstly, we decided I would keep my own name when I married Kevin so don't be confused if you hear someone asking who Dr Atkinson is. Secondly, I have been a vegetarian since I was a student, but Kevin is most definitely not!

I very much hope that we can meet soon

Elsbeth