



## **Bishop Will Hazlewood, the Common Good and Together in Sussex**

### **Together in Sussex and the Common Good - working together**

Before becoming the new Bishop of Lewes, Bishop Will was a Parish Priest for 19 years. Taking over responsibility for Social Good from Bishop Richard, he is keen to see how Together in Sussex can provide resources to support hard-pressed parish clergy at this difficult time.

Bishop Will has responsibility for the Common Good vision and held the first meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October to begin conversations with partners organisations.

### **The Common Good Vision**

‘At its simplest, Common Good is about us articulating what our faith calls us to do, say and model in our communities. This starts with reading scripture and turning to God in prayer. These disciplines tell us loudly that every individual human being is of infinite value to God. The Sacramental life of the church reminds us that Church is only church when we come together as a community.’

‘Over the last 20 years, for all sorts of reasons, community has become more diverse but also less connected locally. What is the church doing to support community life? The church used to be at the heart of community life, in education and health and social care. Then the Welfare State comes along – which is brilliant! But has this meant we have lost some of our identity in these areas where we seek to serve?’

‘In our current age I think we’ve learnt a lot about ourselves; that we are all inter-connected, that we learn relationship with others, and we are not in control of our own lives, which has always really been a myth.’

‘Perhaps the hope that these surges of social action - when we help each other, do shopping, support the NHS, when we decide on a profession because it is our vocation as opposed to what we earn – I hope we hold onto some of these things at the end of this awful pandemic. Many people have found this sort of thing of real value to them, that it brings real satisfaction. We are socially motivated as human beings. We need each other and the more diverse that is the better it is for the community as well.’

‘One of the few advantages of this dreadful pandemic is that it has forced parishes to become more connected in the e-world. Together in Sussex provides parishes with easily accessible resources that are very useful to have and use. The work TiS does fits in usefully with the Diocesan Strategy and TiS is well placed to help churches get involved with the Diocese Vision for Growth. I think it fits in well with ‘being More open’ and ‘More engaged’.’

An example of being more engaged which could be replicated is the Community Wellbeing Centre Together in Sussex set up at Saint Saviour's in Eastbourne. This secured £5000 in funding from East Sussex Council for the Church to run it. If churches identify areas, TiS can help by suggesting partnerships. 'This type of support, as we come out of Lockdown, could have real benefits,' Bishop Will believes.

### **Bishop Will's Three Priorities**

Bishop Will sees three priorities. 'First, there is the care of the individual and their infinite worth in God's eyes. Secondly, there is our Community Life and thirdly, there is a concern for our planet -we really need to prioritise that. Time is running out to make real change. The Church is trying to respond – the target is to be carbon neutral by 2030 but there's a lot of work to do locally.'

'These three are connected. There is evidence that Covid itself came about because of the destruction of natural habitat which caused bats to be in areas of human habitation. That for me is what Common Good is all about. The Church cannot do this in isolation, but we can be a voice among other organisations with similar aims. We can be a voice that connects different areas and groups.'

Bishop Will believes that Together in Sussex can be a social action arm of Common Good. 'I am hopeful that now I am in post the sort of support TiS offers will be talked about more. The areas TiS has been heading up on: isolation, mental health, loneliness, social injustice, modern slavery, homelessness – are all very relevant areas for two of my three priorities of concern. TiS finds resources, repackages them and makes them accessible on one website. Much of this is out there already but churches do not know it is there or how to access it.'

A recent Together in Sussex blog dealt with Credit Unions. A parish priest in Worthing contacted TiS to say they were already engaged in this and had given £10,000 to their local Credit Union. TiS ran a story on this as an example of what churches could do, which appeared in October eNews.

Bishop Will sees there are several ways Church and Clergy can engage with Together in Sussex. 'One thing is talking about it. The parishes often get bombarded with resources for mission, how they are going to pay their parish share and what are they doing about social media during the pandemic – are they livestreaming, using facebook, tik-tok etc, all these platforms.'

### **A Vision for Mission**

'What I like about the Diocesan Vision encapsulated in the Four Mores is sitting down with all this at our heart and working out what our communities need. Each community is different. Even if modern slavery or homelessness doesn't directly affect the local community, it still affects us as Christians and falls under the care and value that God gives each individual. '

‘We need to first ask what the missional needs of the community are, both the community we are in and the wider community to which we belong. It’s as simple as that. What areas of concern are emerging as we go through this crisis? We know it will not go on forever.’

‘For example: Mental Health. We know the suicide rate has risen hugely and that Mental health is underfunded. We know that there is an adverse effect on children and that the poorest communities are most affected. We already have these themes. What are we going to do to help in often in small ways to reach out to those groups adversely affected? How do we raise the profiles of these concerns? This has to be seen in the context of mission. Others must see how our faith motivates us to care. Anything we can do to help parishes, to give them the tools to reach out, remembering that they won’t be able to do all of it!’

‘Together in Sussex can provide the tools for a quick win. For example, many churches are involved in food banks but not many in hygiene banks. Yet hygiene products go before food goes. There are some quick wins for churches. I want to voice these concerns, as the other bishops do. There’s so much we do not know – about Modern Slavery, for example. But we must be careful not to spread ourselves too thinly. There are many churches and if everyone was doing something, we could make a considerable difference.’

#### **An example from Dartmouth**

‘It’s important we use resources effectively. In my previous parish the church doubled as a community centre. We had drop-in lunches in this deprived part of Dartmouth. I was talking to a local mental self-help group called Recovery. They feared they would have to close because they could no longer afford the rent on their premises. I said come and use St Clements’, and this resulted in us hosting a group which grew and led to all sorts of perceptions about mental health being changed. It didn’t cost us anything – the building was open, and I already had volunteers. It was a great thing for us to be able to say we were involved with a group for people with depression. It was a win/win for us. There are all sorts of opportunities out there.’

‘We must see everything through the eyes of mission but keep the perspective broad. Let’s not be apologetic about our faith – we are not just a group involved with social action. We are Christians. It is our faith, prayer and our sacramental life which powers us to do this in God’s name. As far as Common Good and Together in Sussex is concerned, we can jointly build up a resource of those whose faith has led to social action. Then we can provide speakers with practical examples of how this has worked. Modern technology via Zoom can help here as well.’

‘There are opportunities here and there are massive challenges as well. We are a Church which puts most of its resources into local parish communities, I think rightly. But there remains a wider challenge. We are challenged by lack of staff and lack of finance. The pandemic has made these challenges more acute.’

'From inside, it's difficult to always know what our communities want from us as a Church. I think on the whole people are glad the Church is there for an occasional encounter, and still see it predominantly positively but do not always know what its purpose is.

'So, the church needs to regain its confidence in areas of society no one is speaking to. Death and grief, for example. The Church's role in funerals has diminished in recent years. I would like to see the whole of November as a Festival of the Dead. It contains All Saints, All Souls, Remembrance Day. We could do this in simple ways. We could open a church for a weekend of reflection, provide listeners to hear stories of loss and grief and with space to mount pictures of those they have lost. We could gather in a simple act of worship where we can say we miss these people but as Christians do not believe that death is the end.

'The churches have responded creatively to the pandemic but perhaps we have not publicised our work enough. We need to make more noise about the fantastic work being done. Let's do fewer things and do them well, prioritising the three priorities for the Common Good as I see them:

**Care of the individual** and their infinite worth in God's eyes.  
**Care for the Community** for we are called to be a community of faith.  
**Care for the Natural World** because its care has been entrusted to us.'

'Together in Sussex can provide the tools for a quick win. For example, many churches are involved in food banks but not many in hygiene banks. Yet hygiene products go before food goes. There are some quick wins for churches. I want to voice these concerns, as I know the other bishops do. There are many churches and if everyone was doing something, we could make a considerable difference,' Bishop Will believes.

Elle Weaver

Development Manager and Head of Wellbeing and Mental Health

[elle.weaver@togetherinsussex.org.uk](mailto:elle.weaver@togetherinsussex.org.uk)

07751 873735