

Bishop's letter for parish magazines: November 2008

The Bishop writes

Trust me - I'm a Bishop

There are many possible responses to this plea, ranging from: "You must be joking - I did that once and I won't make that mistake again", to "Of course I will because being trustworthy is part of what being a Bishop is all about".

Probably most people will position themselves somewhere between these extremes of pathological suspicion and unconditional confidence when it comes to trusting Bishops - or anyone else for that matter.

But why is trust so important? Well, the whole of our Banking system depends on it and recent events have raised all sorts of questions about the extent to which money-marketeers can be trusted to deliver efficient and fair economic outcomes without strict regulation. Demands for regulation imply increasing erosion of trust, so trust matters.

So, what is trust? The very word has the gift of warming the heart and casting out fear. It is a feel-good word, but we note that it is rarely unconditional. It makes assumptions about the reliability and benevolence of other people which we are seldom prepared to concede without putting in place some fail-safe provisions lest our assumptions prove to be misplaced. This is because, human nature being what it is, individuals will tend to pursue their own interests. Co-operation cannot be assumed.

Yet we do continue to trust other people even when this would appear to be rather risky in a climate of self-centredness and greed. This commitment to go on trusting people may be purely pragmatic - how could a modern economy, democracy or Church continue to operate without some degree of trust being conceded? However, it may be attributable to something much more fundamental about what it means to be human.

We live in relationship with one another and where there is no trust, there can be no relationship. Trust is fundamental to life in community, and it is fundamental to what we call faithfulness. Faith is a disposition of the mind and will to entrust oneself and one's interests to the reliability and benevolence of another. When that "other" is God, then faith is the ultimate expression of trust and it is our faith in the unconditional trustworthiness of God which enables us to entrust ourselves to others in the sure and certain hope that, even if that trust does prove to be misplaced, underneath are the everlasting arms.

Trust me, I'm a Bishop - but only if you trust God even more.

+ John Lincoln