

Chosen, Called, Commissioned

Clergy Conference 2025

Pilgrims of hope

Keynote: Sr Gemma Simmonds SJ

Joanna Gallant

It's a delight to have her here. Gemma is the Director of Religious Life at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge where she lives with her sisters. And she's there I should say when she's not globetrotting. Just ask her what she's going to be doing between now and Christmas. I'm exhausted at the thought of it. Or when she's not rubbing shoulders with popes. So if you want the inside on the new Pope Leo, she's your girl.

I've known Gemma probably for about 12 years now when I was a student at Heathrop and I had the huge privilege of being taught by Gemma. It really was delightful week after week to be able to sit at her feet and just listen to the depth of not just her knowledge and her theology but just her life experience which is so vast and it impacted me hugely. And then five years ago she took on the most - well, I don't think there's a word for it, the huge task of being my spiritual director, anyone cope with me? Yeah, it needs to be honoured in some special way. So it is a huge, huge privilege for me to welcome Gemma to the conference today. And I'm going to hand over to her.

Gemma Simmonds

Well, when I said to them in Cambridge, I'm going over to do some work for the Diocese of Oxford, there was a pause. And one of my colleagues said, I see you're going over to the dark side. So I said, well, I shall be exorcised before I go and after I come back. There's nothing to worry about.

Truly, it is the most fantastic privilege to have been asked to talk to you. I do actually, I am an ecumenical canon of the Church in Wales, which is the daughter of a Welsh nonconformist and a French Catholic. I feel I kind of met somewhere in the middle there.

And ecumenism has been very, very close to my heart, both pastorally and theologically for a long time, but especially since I was given the privilege 12 years ago of being invited by Archbishop Justin Welby to be one of the first trustees of the community of St Anselm at Lambeth Palace. And I'm now their chair of trustees. And among the many, many amazing things that he did in his time as Archbishop of Canterbury, for me that's the number one.

Creating a community that is absolutely open ecumenically and internationally and helping young people from all over the world know that it is actually possible to live in community and to find their calling in Christ through difference as well as through similarity. So that has been one of the great privileges of my life.

I also this year, I kind of need to tell you this only so that you know that you've got a genuine old lady talking to you. I actually celebrate my golden jubilee of religious life this year, which is amazing.

I can see you all asking yourself, how is it possible that someone looks so young? They snatched me from the baptismal font with the water barely dry upon my baby brow, straight into the novitiate, you understand, and that's how it comes about. I'm also conscious that those of you who know Susy Brouard in the audience here, I taught Susie when, from the age of 10 onwards, which I don't know whether that says more about how old I am or how old you are, but either way, I know where the bodies are buried, so for a small consideration afterwards, I am prepared to spill the beans.

So, you know, this year has been a year for me of reflecting very deeply on, you know, what it means to have spent 50 years in a religious order. And therefore what it means to have spent 50 years kind of developing, becoming a nun as it were, because I feel very strongly that any kind of sacrament or sacramental type covenant between ourselves and God, very often it happens on one day in a kind of official sense.

But just as those of you who are married know, you have a wedding day and you go on getting married every day after that. And those of you who are ordained, you know that you have an ordination day and you go on getting ordained every day after that. Well, so it is, and I know Sister Elizabeth would say the same, wouldn't you? With religious life, you make these vows without having any idea what actually it means until the rubber hits the road and you think, having said that, I have a very vivid memory of one of the first novice conferences we had, and we had a very, very fine, very holy, but very down to earth novice mistress who said to us, do not delude yourself for one moment that you have come here for a life of sacrifice. If you want sacrifice, get married and have children.

And I hear the wincing laugh from the parents among you. And actually at the time I thought, what is she talking about? I've just given everything up. I've just closed my bank account. I've just left my family. Oh! And as my siblings and my friends began to get married and have children, I thought, that's what she was talking about.

But as Jo said, we, well, I've certainly had a very exciting two weeks. I have given, I think 22 TV or radio broadcasts at the last fortnight since Pope Francis died on the day that I had gone home to have a rest. So much for that. And my favourite moment was when the BBC rang and said, look, we know it's a big ask, but could you come on at five o'clock tomorrow morning? Really not my best moment. And I said, well, you know, all for Jesus. So yes, yes, I'll, you know, I'll come on at five o'clock in the morning. And the next morning, five o'clock, you know, was chatting away to the girl on the other end of the line. And I said, golly, it's just as well that this is radio, because my hair looks like a gong and I'm wearing, you know, pyjamas. I'm in bed. She said, oh my God, didn't they tell you? It's live TV and you're on in two minutes.

I don't think I have ever moved so fast in my life. Brushing my hair, stripping off my thing, and then putting on another thing, okay, pyjama bottoms there, fine, nobody can see me from the waist up. And managed to go, good morning!

So I've been kind of thinking about Peter and about Peter's call for the last fortnight, and I'm going to be reflecting a little bit um on Peter and on pilgrimage, pilgrimage of hope, because if I look at Peter's life and the life of the disciples and all our lives, it is as pilgrims.

And long, long ago when I was Susy's Spanish teacher, we learned some poetry by a Spanish poet called Antonio Machado. And one of Machado's famous poems translated says,

'Traveler, your footsteps are the path and nothing else. Traveler, there is no path. You make the path by walking.'

There is no path. You know, there's nothing set out. You make the path by walking. And that is, think, what every single one of us has been called to do, to make the path by walking. And if I said to you, you know, whatever age you are now, when you were 15, when you were 18, whatever age you were when God first called you, did you think it would be like this?

Well, no! is the answer. Some of you may have read a book by the late great Gerard Hughes called God of Surprises. Well you're telling me, you know, surprise is God's middle name.

And what do we do with these surprises that we get, some of which are, you know, wrapped up in nice shiny paper, and some of them come with a thud on top of our heads when we're least expecting it. But if what we say is, okay, one more step along the road, one more step with you, then we do find ourselves eventually looking back over a life and thinking, well, that was the ride a lifetime and I never expected it but actually I'm glad it was as it was.

And one of the people I think who could say that in history most powerfully was somebody who also bridges well Oxford and Cambridge and also the Anglican and Catholic churches - John Henry

Newman. And Newman wrote this prayer, reflection, whatever you may call it:

God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another.

We don't come as cardboard cutouts. Thank God. There is no production line in which little priests are banged out in a factory, you know? And just look around this room, you know, God loves variety. And I am sure of one thing is that when we get to heaven, the first thing we will notice on other people's faces will be the look of surprise. What, you here?! You know?

And that's how we'll look at each other. I wonder what we'll feel if we turn around the corner in heaven and see Judas. That's one of the people I'm hoping to see. Because as we know, Jesus is a tremendous last-minute merchant. And my hope is that there was a last moment there, as there has been a last moment for many of the villains in history.

And please God, there will be a last moment for you and me to sneak in under the wire. So here is Newman. He's committed some work to me which he's not committed to another. In the universe there is a me-shaped space that no one else can fill. Only me.

And that's what we need to say to our young people because so many of them are living with a real crisis of meaning, a crisis of value, a crisis of identity. You know, who am I supposed to be? And there is so much

pressure, so much more than there ever was on me, or even some of you who are in your 40s now.

There is so much pressure on them online to be this kind of a person. You're only valuable, you're only valid, you're only worthy, you're only okay if you look like this, if you speak like this, if you wear these clothes, if you conform, conform, conform to whatever tribalism it is that they belong to. And here we are saying, actually no, you are unique and precious in God's sight and there's something you have to do in this world that only you can do. Will you come on the adventure? And that's what God has said to each one of us.

Newman continues:

I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I'm a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good. I shall do his work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep his commandments.

Again, I love that. A preacher of truth in my own place. Well, I have to say that one of the things that really draws me to ecumenical work is precisely the generosity and hospitality of the welcome I always receive within the Anglican Communion.

I have to say to my immense shame and sorrow, it doesn't always work the other way around. If it's any comfort to you, it doesn't work for me either. I cannot imagine myself ever being invited to speak at a diocesan conference of Catholic clergy. I labour under the

disadvantage of my chromosomes, you understand. The day will come.

But here we are in a church and here you are in a communion that has really struggled and fought to create place, room, make space, make room for difference. And I know that these days, certainly across the Atlantic, the very word diversity is rather a dirty word. But my goodness, when you see it in practice, isn't it a wonderful and welcome thing? And here we are being told that we will be preachers of truth in our own place. If only we keep God's commandment and what is the greatest commandment but to love one another.

And he goes on, therefore I will trust him whatever I am. I can never be thrown away. If I'm in sickness, my sickness may serve him. In perplexity, my perplexity may serve him. If I'm in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what he's about.

He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirit sink, hide my future from me. Still, he knows what he's about.

Well, it may be that you're sitting here at this moment in your life in consolation. It may be that you're sitting here in desolation, or probably, like most of us, a mixture of the two. But here we are. God doesn't make mistakes.

There was a wonderful member of the De La Salle religious order, an order of brothers in the Catholic Church called Damian Lundy. He was a music and songwriter who was famous in the early 1980s for

introducing charismatic music to the Catholic Church. Gosh, that was an achievement. And Damian had a yellow sticky note, a post-it note that he put on the mirror where he shaved in the mornings. And it said,

'I'm Damian and I'm okay because God doesn't make rubbish.'

And one of his religious brethren came along and wrote underneath,

'He just collects it.'

See how these brothers love one another, But you know, I'm Damian and I'm okay. I'm Gemma, I'm whatever our name is, and I'm okay. You know, because God doesn't make mistakes. And if we have nothing else to offer our young people, it's to convince them of that.

Two days after Pope Francis died, I had, gosh, both the pleasure and the burden of preaching at the funeral of one of my Heathrop students. She was 33 years old when she took her own life. And her parents did a search for me on the internet and found me, asked me if I would come and preach at her funeral. That was a tough gig, to be honest.

And I wish with all my heart that in the intervening years between her being my student and doing that terrible thing to herself, I had been able to say to her, I know it's tough. I know it's tough being you, but God doesn't make mistakes, and you are not a mistake.

You know, maybe that's my illusion of being able to save people and I know I can't and most of us learn that the hard way in ministry that we cannot save people and we certainly cannot save ourselves. However hard we might try, but we can throw ourselves onto the mercy of God. And hopefully, convey to other people the mercy of God who looks at us with love and looks at us knowing all that he has made and finds it very good.

Now, I did a little bit of work for the On Fire Mission last week, and I know there's at least one of you here who was there, you're going to have to forgive me that the next three slides you may have seen before. I was very struck by Pope Francis's shoes. I mean, it's a kind of weird Catholic fetish that you get obsessed with papal shoes, but you know, there you are. We're weird that way. And Francis absolutely refused to do various things. You know, when he became Pope, they wanted him to go out on the balcony with all the kind of regalia. And he famously turned around to them and said, 'Gentlemen, the carnival is over.' And just went out in a very, very plain white vestment.

And he insisted to the very end of his life on wearing his own battered old shoes. And, you know, there they are. If you look closely at the picture, they're pretty scuffed and what have you and worn. They're the shoes of someone who's done a lot of walking one way or the other.

And here he says:

'One does not proclaim the gospel standing still, locked in an office at one's desk or at one's computer, arguing like keyboard warriors and replacing the creativity of proclamation with copy and paste ideas

taken from here and there. The gospel is proclaimed by moving, by walking, by going.'

We go back to Bishop Steven's insistence this morning on 'Get up and go.'

Now, I also want those of you who do have to spend a lot of time sitting at your computers, I don't want you to think you're being got at here, okay? Because many of you enable the missionary movement outwards by doing the heavy lifting on the admin side. And those like me who could not administer their way out of a paper bag are immensely grateful to you for doing it, okay?

But I think there's a point here about actually we have to be willing to move. Not so much because we are bringing things to them, but because when we move, when we put ourselves in unfamiliar situations, we open ourselves to conversion.

I spent two years after I had spent 17 years in leafy Berkshire, I spent two years as a missionary in Brazil.

And people often then and now ask me, you know, what did you bring to Brazil? And I would say, I have no idea what I brought to Brazil, except the ability for the people I came to, to laugh their heads off. I was saying to some of the other people last night, the street children where I was tried to teach me to dance the samba.

That was a losing battle. And one of the girls, you know, this high, puts her hands on her hips and said to me, 'Auntie, you'd dance as if you're made of wood.' And I said, 'yes, it's called being British, darling.'

I, you know, the things we learn from the people to whom we are sent.

I did 25 years in prison ministry as a volunteer chaplain at Holloway Prison. And one Easter, the wonderful now archbishop of, a Catholic archbishop of Birmingham, Bernard Longley, who was our auxiliary bishop in Westminster at that time, used to come into the prison Easter and Christmas to say Mass. And he said to them, 'Now it's Easter Sunday and we're not going to say the creed. We're going to renew our baptismal promises. I'm going to say some stuff and if you agree, you say 'I do''

So he starts, 'Do you believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth?' And all the women shout back, 'I do'.

'And do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was crucified, died and was buried?' And one of the women shouts from the back, 'Well, I do, but I still don't think they should have killed him like that.' Fabulous.

Fabulous, spontaneous liturgy. And dear Bernard didn't skip a beat, said, 'You know, you're quite right. They shouldn't. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?'

Now, here is one of the successes of Peter, who was famous, therefore, for being a pope of the streets, a pope who told us that God was calling us to be revolutionaries of tenderness. You know, for an Argentinian to talk about being a revolutionary, woo, is big, big stuff because that was not good news in Argentina. And he lived through the Dirty War in Argentina, where revolutionaries were gathered up, taken into airplanes, and dropped from a great height straight into the sea, including a number of priests and nuns and catechists, people that he knew. Revolutionaries of tenderness. He also called us to build a culture of encounter.

So here's the question, how do we do that? How do we build cultures of encounter? And my experience is that the first way we do this is to go in as someone who has something to learn, as well as something to give, something to learn and understand, as well as something to proclaim, to go in as someone who needs to be catechised by those to whom we are sent.

And sometimes the catechesis comes wrapped in rather weird language and rather weird forms, but if we listen, we hear truths that perhaps other people are too polite to tell us.

But Peter himself, he had to make the path by walking. And what I love about Peter is it's nearly always two steps forward, one step back. And sometimes one step forward and two steps back. Because he was a great one for mouth first, brain next. And we see him make those mistakes over and over again. And I find it so comforting to think that Peter the Rock was somebody who made so many mistakes. And just in case we think that Paul was much better, let's remember that apart

from the fact that he was a lousy speaker, Paul was also the only man I know in history who quite literally bored someone to death.

I'm not sure it got much better as he got older. He also, have you noticed, he fell out with absolutely everybody he ever worked with, except for Luke, who must have had, well he clearly did have the patience of a saint, but my goodness, know, even Barnabas, the son of encouragement, you know, eventually got fed up with Paul. He must have been such a difficult character. And what a comfort it is to know, you know, when we're struggling with our own limitations, our own weaknesses and we wish we were a wonderful person like the bishop or like the archdeacon or whoever it is, know, Mother Teresa, whoever, just think, well, you know, if he chose Peter and Paul, gosh, he could choose me too.

So here is Francis. These are the shoes, well, similar to the shoes of Pope John Paul II, who wore white DMs. I'm not sure he wore patent ones, actually, but, you know, what are Doc Marten boots good for? They're good for giving people a good kick. And he needed to give the Soviet Union a good kicking where it really hurt, and he did.

And it was interesting, again, I did a lot of listening to interviews and things on the BBC, and last week there was one interview actually with- he was an American who was a kind of a lapsed Catholic who'd come back to the practice of his faith, and he was from Chicago, and he was talking about Pope Leo. And the interviewer said to him, well, it was all about, well, what political party does he support, and what's the political meaning of all of this? And he just said, 'Look, it's not about political meaning. It's about actually proclaiming the gospel where you are.'

And clearly the interviewer really didn't know what that meant and said, 'well, can you explain what you mean?' And he said, 'yeah, I can. Just think about, you know, Pope John Paul II, how did he show leadership? By going into the shipyards of Poland and proclaiming the love of God.' That was the revolution that toppled the Soviet Union. You know, Stalin said, where are the Pope's battalions? Well, that's where the Pope's battalions were. The proclamation to the people of the liberating love of God. That's all the dream people need in order to seize the moment and seize their own moment of freedom.

So, you know, a very different style of leadership, a very different style of making the path by walking in white DMs that are not afraid, in the name of Christ, to kick the devil where it hurts. And to start helping others to walk their way to freedom. And the last contrast, the little red shoes of Pope Benedict.

And many people made many comments about these red shoes. I'm guilty of having done it myself. I think he had quite a fancy for red shoes. And so there it was. He wore the red shoes that are traditional footwear of the popes. And there are those who would lead through tradition.

But I have a favourite saying about tradition that comes from another Spaniard, Pablo Picasso, who famously said,

Tradition is having a baby, not wearing your grandfather's hat.

That's a rather odd saying, but just think about it for a minute. Tradition is having a baby.

Giving birth to something new, handing on, creating another generation to hand on to, rather than trying to live in a generation not your own. So tradition has to be something living. And there is a great deal to be said. I wouldn't be a Roman Catholic if I didn't take tradition seriously. But if tradition is not something alive, then what we're handing on to our next generations is a dead body.

But our young people, and we heard a little bit about it today, and certainly where I'm sitting, I know that we had a significant number of new baptisms and confirmations among young adults in Cambridge this Easter. Young adults seeking something within a living tradition that they can hold onto, something that they think it's worth following. In the Cambridge University chaplaincy, where I was chaplain some 30 years ago, we had an Ignatian week of guided prayer last term. 70 of them signed up for it. You know, if that doesn't tell you something, students willing to give an hour a day in the toughest week of an eight week term to pray and to talk about their prayer lives with someone else. If that doesn't tell you something about the thirst that our young people have for authenticity, for relationship with God, with something beyond themselves, I don't know what does.

So our call to be pilgrims of hope, whether we wear the scuffed shoes of the street, or the white DMs of authority, or the red shoes of tradition, if we are good in our own feet, but as the Native American saying goes, be ready to walk a mile in another person's moccasins, to walk a mile in someone else's shoes, and to learn what it is to be a

pilgrim of hope. That's what we're called to, that's what we're called for and into.

And, you can see I'm going on a riff here with the shoe theme. Again, from Pope Francis's *The Joy of the Gospel*:

The talk of evangelisation operates within the limits of language and circumstances. It always does what good it can, even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.

And he then said something that upset some of his fellow cardinals and bishops very much indeed. But anyway, he said it.

I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it's been out on the streets rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.

Well, isn't that a wake-up call for all of us in all of our churches?

To what extent is our church, the church we not only belong to, but actually live and communicate to others, to what extent is it, or is it prepared to be bruised, hurting, and dirty? Because that's the challenge to us, I believe, today, and never more so than in today's world.

I'm going to pause because I think, you know, after lunch it's cruel to talk to people for too long. And just give you a moment to think, what

have I seen? What have I heard so far this afternoon that really sits with me, that really strikes me, that I want to take further?

When you've had a moment to sit with that, could I invite you just to have a word with your nearest neighbour or neighbours, if you don't know who they are, just give yourselves a moment to exchange names, and then just share what sits with me, what sits with you. When you're ready.

I have a little more that I want to say. And my hope is that this will stir up conversations that can go on in the next three days.

Again, on the question of evangelisation, the joy of the gospel says this, an evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives. It bridges distances. It's willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. And that is, in the end, what I think we are invited to do, having also acknowledged the suffering flesh of Christ in ourselves. And as I know, all of you know who are in the business of forgiveness and reconciliation, the hardest person it is to forgive is ourselves, usually. It's hardest to forgive our own mistakes or what we consider to be our mistakes and our limitations, and that's where the conversion begins.

And there are choices about this. I was doing some work not long ago for the Benedictine monks at Douie Abbey near Reading. And they have a little old ~ Victorian church with some rather artistically undistinguished stained glass windows. But there was something very

telling in one of the windows and I wanted to share it with you. It's a, as I say, rather poor depiction of the passion.

But what I noticed when I saw this was the two thieves on either side. As you probably know, the thief on the left depicts the one known as the good thief, the thief who in his last dying breath asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom, ~ known as Saint Dismas and opposite him is the bad thief so called Gestas, who did nothing but curse. And If we look at Gestas there he is on his cross, bound and unable to move, bound as Christ is bound and yet Christ's arms are stretched out even in death.

Even when his hands are nailed to the cross and he's unable to move, somehow the arms are still stretched out and I think there's a significance there. Dismas on the other hand somehow has managed to get a hand free and is stretching out, reaching out to Christ.

And it's that reaching out that makes it possible for him to hear possibly the most powerful and beautiful words ever said by one dying man to another. 'Truly, I tell you, this very day, you will be with me in paradise.' Extraordinary, extraordinary words to say when your own life is draining out of you. And that is the invitation to every one of us to even within our limitations somehow even in just our desires to reach out and not allow ourselves to be bound by our own sense of helplessness and our own sense of limitation.

So what is the process of conversion? Well, I came across the words of an American Jesuit. Both Holloway Prison and Heathrop College closed more or less at the same time, so those were both of my

sources of ministry. I felt a bit like one of those army generals on the Battle of Waterloo who kept having horses shot out from under them, you know? And I decided the thing to do was to go and make a 30-day retreat. It was the third of such retreats that I've made, and each one has been at a very different time of my life and very different.

And I found myself making this retreat with a bunch of American Jesuit novices in Boston and their novice master had done this reflection on the first week of the Ignatian exercises, which, if you know anything about them, is a week where one spends quite a bit of time thinking about sin. And you might think, well, that's a pretty miserable way to spend some time.

But Ignatius's point is, unless we really know we are sinners, we will never know truly that we are forgiven. We will never experience amazing grace. And it's like the words of Jesus himself about the woman who was a sinner when she came into the house of somebody who was very, very keen on his own respectability. know, her sins, how many sins must have been forgiven or she would not have loved so much.

So knowing ourselves as loved and forgiven sinners. And here is the process, as it were, of conversion as we see it in the Ignatian exercises. So first step, when the self deeply realises that it exists rather than not existing, here I am. This is me. Any of you familiar with the musical film, The Greatest Showman, there's an amazing tune in there, sung by the circus freaks, the people who were chosen because of the way they looked to be stared at and mocked and laughed at, who sing, you know, This is Me, and I am myself.

When the existing self, believing itself bad, encounters itself in the light of God as good. Actually, amazing grace. God looks at all that he's made and finds it very good. And when the good self, recognising its sinfulness, nevertheless finds itself forgiven. I was lost and now I'm found. Blind but now I see.

And when the forgiven self, feeling conflicted about that limitation and sinfulness, hears itself called. Who, me? Yup, you. I come from a family of five siblings. My sister is the eldest and she's the good girl. And I was the baby and I was very definitely the bad girl. And we had the three boys in a kind of pincer movement in the middle, which is where they needed to be and still are to this day. And I had the misfortune, she was the head girl of our primary school and of our secondary school, so I had the misfortune of being at a school where people kept saying, isn't it a shame you're not more like your sister? And I thought, I'll show you how different I can be.

So we were in a school that was a bit like Hogwarts, know, school houses and all of that. And I was expelled from my house for just being completely impossible. And so people were always on the warpath. If it wasn't the teachers, it was the prefects or somebody. And I took to hiding in the chapel because there was one place no one would ever in their wildest dreams look for me in there. And I got used to just, I used to creep round into the Lady Chapel, so if somebody did happen to open the doors, they couldn't see anyone in there. And I would sit there and I would tell her all about how rotten it was and how unfair it was and how stupid everybody was and how ridiculous the rules were and how, you know, I should never have been sent to this school in the first place and I wanted to get home and, and that's how I learned to pray. Because I got used to being, to having a sympathetic listening ear, basically, and before I knew it, God is such an opportunist, isn't

he? Really? You know? The forgiven self, feeling conflicted. ~ my poor old 11-year-old self did feel conflicted. Hears itself called, well, there's God's little joke.

And when the called self, now deeply aware of its limitation, experiences itself accepted by God and called into the world for a purpose. You are not a mistake. And that's what I kept hearing from God over and over and over again as a conflicted and miserable 12 year old. You are not a mistake.

Ooh, and by the time I was 16, I thought, I'm going to have to do something about this. And the rest, as they say, is history. So when the self deeply realises that it exists rather than not existing, when the existing self, believing itself bad, encounters itself as good, when the good self, recognizing its sinfulness, finds itself forgiven, when the forgiven self, feeling conflicted, hears itself called.

And when the called self, now deeply aware of its limitation, experiences nevertheless itself accepted by God and called into the world for a purpose. My goodness, if we can offer this to anybody, man, woman or child, and help them to experience this for themselves, if we do it for one person, we have fulfilled the purpose for which God called us. We really have.

And it's so easy for us to think of ourselves. I used to use these pictures. The paintings are mostly those of the German priest painter, Sieger Köder. And I used to use them a lot in the prison because many of our women couldn't read. And whenever I showed this painting, there'd be someone who said, that's us, isn't it? Rubbish. And I'd say,

well, maybe, but you know what? God is the biggest recycler in the business. And what is recycling but taking what other people throw out as trash and turning it into treasure? So, you know, let's all be recycled by God, why not?

And there'd be kind of grunts of approval. Well, might give it a try. Why, okay. And where we find ourselves called is into community, into first of all the community of relationship of the Trinity. You might see that the- the square, kind of, between the square between the knees of angel on left and right. An awful lot of ink has been spilled on the meaning of that square and some art historians have discovered a sort of resinous substance there. They think there was probably a mirror there and that what it was there for was for the person looking at the icon to see their own face reflected back as being the person who fulfils the circle. And that is where our relationship with God lies, within that circle of relationship.

And again, this is Köder's stained glass window, in fact, of the song of songs, the embrace of the lover and the beloved, the bride and the beloved, at the centre of the heart, of human nature, I was absolute rubbish at maths and science at school. Only managed to matriculate at university at all because I got a biology O level and I got the biology O level because I was a dab hand at drawing the amoeba. Not very difficult, sort of squiggle in the middle. And what I did remember about an amoeba is that every amoeba has to have a nucleus. Every cell has to have, I know this is very obvious to those of you who are scientists, but it's a wonder to me, has to have ~ a nucleus in the middle of it. And that nucleus is God's yes, God's yes to me, as I am, and God's embrace of that yes. So learning to be human in relationship with God in the person of Jesus.

And of course, it's also the same yes that God gives the church messy and dysfunctional, my days, as it is. Wonderful story about the Benedictine nuns who were up, well they were in Stanbrook in Worcestershire, they're now up north in Yorkshire. And there was a journalist who came to the monastery to do one of these My Life as a Nun features and interviewed one of the older sisters and said, 'Sister, were you surprised that God should have called you to this life?' And she said, 'Well, yes, I was surprised, but not half as surprised as I am that he called some of the others we've got in here.'

And isn't that the same with the church? You just think, what, you? Really? You know, it's a messy business. And there are lots of people in it that we wish were not there. Because if only they'd be more like us. They'd be fine, wouldn't they? And that's not how he calls people. Just look at the 12 disciples oh my days. So learning to be human in relation with God within the family of Jesus.

And, I'm conscious in my last few minutes that I'm talking at a conference for clergy, for people who spend a huge amount of energy looking after other people. And some of you have heard me do this before because, among other things, Archbishop Justin asked me to give a brief bit of retreat to the bishops when they were all gathered. Talk about a scary gig. mean, Bishop Steven said, you know, you looked scary this morning. Imagine if every one of you in this room had been a bishop. Crikey. So that was a scary gig.

And I thought, OK, these are words I wish I had heard at various points in my life and ministry, which are words from Alcoholics Anonymous. No comment on people's capacity for drinking and on my own

welcome in the bar last night. But there's a great deal of wisdom in AA about addictive compulsive behaviours.

And one of their little acronyms is HALT, which stands for Never Let Yourself Get Too Hungry, Too Angry, Too Lonely, or Too Tired, because that will be when the compulsive behaviours kick in. Hungry for what? Not so much about skipping meals, but hungry for nourishing. What gives you energy, the energy to go on? What nourishes your soul life?

You know, when you go into an aeroplane, there's always, you know, they tell you what to do if everything goes belly up and you have to jump out the door, you know, where the doors are and, you know, hit the panic button. And they tell you that if the oxygen masks come down and you are a parent and you have children with you, you must put your own oxygen mask on first before you help anyone else. It's so counterintuitive. Every parent in the room, I bet you, would want to be putting their children's on before their own.

Fact is, if you are choking to death and can't breathe, you're of no use to anyone else. And we do this to ourselves in ministry very easily. We forget to nourish ourselves.

So whatever can be done to keep that nourishment going is vitally important. We know that any of us in any form of leadership, in any form of community work, we are going to deal with a lot of anger. Our own anger, swallowed because we're good Christians and good Christian girls and boys don't get angry much.

I've lived in a religious community for 50 years and I can assure you every nun I know has got a PhD in passive aggression. The ones who keep on putting little sticky notes everywhere 'Kindly do da da da...' Nothing kind about it ducky. Or the ones that are so provocative to me, the ones that say, 'polite notice.' And I want to put underneath it, rude notice. Bugger off with your notices. Pleasant day in a convent.

Lonely, well there's an inherent loneliness about being someone who's in ministry. And tired, most of us are running on empty most of the time. And here are words of great wisdom from a community that knows what it is to be compulsive. Halt.

Give yourself some time, which is why it's fabulous to be with you at this time in these days. And if you look at the cycle of addiction, it begins with pain, which drives us to the need to act out. And for many of us, the acting out is covered by it being something wonderful. Overwork, overextension, compulsive helper.

There are many, many such people in the caring professions, including in the church. And the acting out gives us temporary relief. And then we deal with the consequences of acting out, which are often exhaustion and, you know, I can't do this anymore, and depression and, and, and then the pain, and then it goes round and round again. And what we have in Christ is the Christ who in the cross and in the descent into hell, smashes down the gates of hell as we can see there, squishes Satan under his feet, the one who binds us. If you look into the vault of hell there, you see all these little white squiggles, they are the locks and chains with which Satan binds us.

And Jesus yanks Adam and Eve out of their grave and into freedom. Some of you may know the writings of the Norwegian- He's actually a Cistercian monk who has now become the Bishop of Trondheim, again a former student of mine, called Erik Varden. And Erik wrote this in a wonderful book about the woundedness of Christ.

We are called to step outside our own shadow into the bright light of mercy. It may burn at first, but then it liberates, delivering us from imprisonment in the dank dungeon of self. So this is where we pray and our deep prayer needs to be a prayer for liberation.

I'm actually going to skip the next couple of slides, because I want to finish with a quotation from the letter to the Hebrews.

May we who have taken refuge in him be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us.

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered. I love that, the thought of the anchor of hope, because I go back to Peter, who was a fisherman and who knew a great deal about anchors.

And I think as a lifelong fisherman, he knew where his anchor was. The invitation to each one of us as a pilgrim of hope, the invitation to each one of us who has lived with the call that we have received, even though we may feel so unworthy of it and that we have so poorly fulfilled it, is that he is our anchor, and he is our hope. And he has entered behind the curtain on our behalf and comes to us as the great

liberator from our limitations. And will say to each and every one of us as we end our life of ministry, well done, good and faithful servant. Dear friends, thank you very much.

Joanna

Thank you. Dear Gemma, thank you for your wisdom. Thank you for so, so many insights. That's enough for me actually for the rest of the conference. You won't see me now. I'll be sat in the chapel just thinking more as other people end. A small token of our appreciation and there will be a gift for your sisters too. Thank you very much, but it's as ever an absolute delight to listen to you.

And I have been struck by that sense of being ourselves as we are chosen to be. And I was saying to Andy when we shared in pairs, I'm not quite sure I'm wearing the right shoes, but then, as you well know, my life before was a dancer. Sometimes you have to break the shoes in. So don't know if that's relevant for anyone else here, but I just thought I would mention that. But thank you for that. Once again, you've helped me. But thank you for speaking to all of us.