**Chair’s Report on 2019-20 NADAWM Conference via Zoom**

This month, I will have been a DAWM for five years. It has been a time of huge change for women in ministry and for the NADAWM network. 2015 was the year that our first women bishops were consecrated after a long and bruising process. Many DAWMs had stayed in role to see this momentous step forward for women in the Church, but decided – very reasonably - in the 18 months that followed that they had done their part. As a result, we have had a huge turnover of members in the NADAWM network which has been both a challenge as we attempt to keep some sort of cohesiveness and continuity, but also a blessing as we have welcomed new people, fresh insights and renewed energy. I am hugely grateful to those longer serving DAWMs whose wisdom, experience and generosity has kept us going through this time of transition.

People both inside the NADAWM network and outside it have been asking – now that women can be bishops, now that argument is done, and now that women have been ordained priest for a quarter of a century – what are DAWMs for? On the outside, there are some who consider DAWMs are no longer needed. On the inside, there is a real sense of work still to be done, but how do we articulate it?

In short, while we have removed some of the most obvious structural barriers to women flourishing in their ministry in the Church, the bigger and less clear-cut task of cultural change remains. Two millenia of male-shaped ministry is not reshaped overnight. But that is no easy task, and in a church riddled with anxieties about numbers, finances and conflict over human sexuality, it is a challenge to keep colleagues focussed on gender equality, when there is a natural desire to celebrate what has been achieved and tick that box on the to-do list.

It is not a task we do alone, however. Other people are ensuring that women’s experience is noticed, analysed and acted upon. We have heard Rev’d Dr Susy Brouard’s research today. Other important publications in the last year are the WATCH report on Ministry Statistics (which is an excellent report to begin conversations with colleagues) the WATCH resources on Mutual Flourishing, a report from the strategic learning and development programme cohort 2 which looked at diversity in the church through the lens of women’s ministry (hosted on our webpage) and a recently published report from Leicester diocese called “Women: The State of Play” exploring experiences of and attitudes to women’s ministry in their diocese. Years of work, and a concerted effort involving pressure from many different groups mean that Church House have published good practice maternity guidelines which encourage parity across the dioceses and provide financial protection for ordinands and new curates who previously had no employment rights.

Working with others is the only way that we will have any hope of achieving this huge task of culture change. That is why over the past 18 months, through our excellent Transformations reps, we have strengthened our working relationships with other groups working together on gender equality: WATCH, the Junia Network (previously Awesome) and BDARC. We are also at the early stages of developing a relationship with the staff team at Church House and plan to have a stand at next July’s General Synod to allow us to network with people from across the national church who care about the flourishing of women in ministry and who might wish to work with us towards this.

As for NADAWM, working together is our greatest strength. We have something that no other group has – a web of women clergy who are both in touch with women colleagues “on the ground” and plugged into their diocesan structures in the majority of dioceses of the CofE. We are in a position to notice trends, identify both good practice and problems, disseminate useful information and gather people together who want to learn or act. As a network, we want to make best use of this community of DAWMs by equipping you for your role through induction resources, networking opportunities and informative conferences so you can equip others. We want to use our network to evaluate the state of play, not just in one diocese but across the national church. We want to engage with others doing similar or complementary work to make best use of the energy and resources available. Equip, Evaluate, Engage have become our watchwords and structure what we do as an Exec and as a network.

One of the areas where we most need to engage is in intersectionality. Our network and our Exec is very white, very able-bodied and – I imagine – fairly heterosexual. The women we seek to represent and work for are incredibly diverse and many bring additional gifts and experience additional discrimination depending on their race, disability and sexuality. We appreciate that an increasing number of DAWMs now hold this responsibility within a wider diversity brief, and so we would like to add an additional role to our Exec – a Diversity rep – whose responsibility will be to help us see our work for gender equality within that wider context and help us serve and represent ALL women better. If you would be interested in doing that, please would you let us know?

I want to finish with some thank yous. Kate Peacock our secretary, Paula Hollingsworth our Treasurer, Heather Butcher our rep for the Eastern region and Helen Dawes, one of our Transformations reps, are all standing down. I am so grateful to all of them for their work, commitment, wisdom and good humour as we have worked together. I will miss them hugely and cannot thank them enough.

I also want to thank you as DAWMs. Most of us do this in addition to other roles in parish, chaplaincy or diocese. Few if any of us are paid for it, yet you serve with generosity and passion and I am so grateful for you. Thank you for your time this afternoon and for all you do to serve your sisters and your church throughout the year. Sometimes we see real progress and cause for celebration. Sometimes we wonder if we will ever make a difference. To encourage you, I finish with a prayer made famous by Oscar Romero:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime
only a tiny fraction
of the magnificent enterprise
that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No programme
accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives
includes everything.

That is what we are about.
We plant a seed that will one day grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations
that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,
and there is a sense of liberation
in realising that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for the Lord's grace
to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

*Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw*

Kate Massey
NADAWM Chair 2020