

Address – Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance, 29 October 2022

As we gather for this annual memorial service, we come together corporately to remember individual loved ones. Whilst we gather as one community, each comes with their unique memories, sorrows and desires. And, each of you will have your personal feelings about what has happened and how you and your loved ones have been treated.

This year, our coming together is particularly poignant as we stand at a time when we can almost see the end of the public inquiry. It was in September 2018 that the inquiry officially opened, four years ago. It was in April 2019 that the first evidence was given. The interceding years have been an emotional rollercoaster for many. There have been many painful hours of heart-wrenching evidence, particularly the very moving testimonies of mothers who have lost their children.

Under the stewardship of Sir Brian Langstaff, confidence in the inquiry has grown and grown. He has exhibited a fearless determination for justice and recognition of past wrongs. His empathetic attitude, belief in real-life experience and appreciation that people are central to the inquiry are admirable and have helped pave the road to justice.

This week must have seen an enormous surge of emotions as interim compensation payments of £100,000 arrived in bank accounts. Whilst the compensation is a recognition by the inquiry, and ultimately the Government, it does bring with it thoughts of the price of a life. It will inevitably be slightly divisive, and be attended with feelings of discomfort, grief, guilt and relief. Relief in recognition, but guilt that other people have not yet received compensation, or yet others are not included in the compensation system at this time.

We all know in our hearts what is right. We each have an innate feeling of fairness. And, we pray that any who may now feel left out and excluded will soon find a sense of fairness, a proper sense of just recognition and unity within the community.

And, the community itself, your community will soon see dramatic change. Whilst there still may be a sense of limbo as final decisions and outcomes are awaited, the end is in sight. With the end of the inquiry will come a great rift.

For four years the inquiry has been a constant in many of your lives. It has nurtured a real-life and an on-line community as people have gathered together to see justice done and the infected and affected receive due recognition. Inevitably, with that legal acknowledgement, comes the end of the inquiry – an

inquiry which has been a large part of many people's, many of your lives. This will have a psychological impact on many. It will create a void for many.

I pray for you that that newly found community and the strength which comes with it will continue after Sir Brian calls proceedings to a close next year. Whilst it may be logistically difficult with many perhaps unable to travel, I pray you will have the strength and ingenuity to keep that supportive network alive and relevant.

So, as we meet here with mixed emotions, it is important that we take a moment to reflect on what the past four years have been about. Fundamentally, these years have been about love and desire for justice.

No matter what, if any, your religion, I think we all recognise that it is love that binds us. Love goes on and continues beyond the grave. The love in which we hold our nearest and dearest does not die with death, nor does it diminish with time. Love is endless, it is a timeless bond. It is that love which has given you the strength to push, to fight relentlessly for justice. Now that you are on the brink of that success in that fight, remember it is love, the love of your loved ones which has brought you here. Let us give thanks for them, for their lives, for the

love they shared with us and the strength and purpose they have given to each of you.

Amen

Reverend David Armstrong