

I'm the Diocese!

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"Have you heard?" whispered Sarah over her shoulder to David and Mary.

"Heard what?" Mary whispered back, leaning forward. The church was filling up pew by pew and people were opening up their hymn books to see if they'd be singing any favourites. It was Sunday and the morning service was about to start.

"We're being visited by *The Diocese* today!" Sarah said screwing up her face, as if she'd said they were being visited the headmaster, or a mob of rioters, or a plague.



"*The Diocese!*?" asked David, eyes darting around the church. "Here? Today? Us? *The Diocese!*?"

Richard had overheard, because contrary to popular belief, his hearing was pitch perfect. He slid down the pew and leaned in. "Oh yes," he said "the Diocese are here alright." He gave a knowing nod.

"They're already here?" demanded Mary, looking toward the door for signs of disruption. "Where?"

"Right *here*," Richard whispered. "The Diocese is sitting on this pew."

Sarah, David, Mary and Anna and Claire who had also overheard, gasped and looked at one another with bulging eyes. They stared up and down the pew, looking into the faces of their fellow parishioners with questioning eyes, and shaking heads. Richard saw their confused looks and said, "Thing is... *I'm* the Diocese."

"No! Oh Richard we didn't know! When did that happen?" At first they seemed sorry for him then they turned suspicious and whispered, "How long have you been the Diocese for?"

“Well...” said Richard, “let me see...all my life I suppose, or at least as long as I’ve been worshipping here, which is pretty much the same thing.”

They couldn’t believe their ears. How could Richard have been secretly The Diocese all these years whilst acting normally in church? He was no better than a spy. All these years! They’d played Bridge together, they’d shared a hedge strimmer, they’d been on the PCC together. What a thing to do!

“It’s true. I am the Diocese. And... so is David.” He nodded in David’s direction. David clamped his hands over his own mouth in shock. His wife glared at him. Sarah’s head turned from Richard to David and back again like she was watching tennis. Claire was pale. Before David could object, Richard carried on, “So is Ian the Reader, and Rev John, and Eunice and Amy in the choir...in fact the whole choir, and the back row? They’re all The Diocese. And the Youth Group? They’re all the Diocese.” Mary forgot herself and said loudly, “No! It cannot be true!” People turned in their pews to stare.

“Mary,” Richard soothed as he laid his hand gently over hers, “Mary, you are The Diocese too.”

It was too much to handle. How could Mary be The Diocese? How could any of them? How could she not have realised? Before she could process this news the congregation got to their feet as the Vicar and choir processed in.

Hymns were sung, prayers were said, a sermon was delivered. There wasn’t time to talk about any of this during The Peace, so after the service they all gathered around Richard to ask just what he had meant. Slowly and calmly Richard explained that the Diocese was in fact made up of all the churches, including this one, and of all the people in the churches. It included all the clergy, all the Wardens and choirs and children and teenagers and even all the people that the church regularly prayed for who could no longer make it in on a Sunday due to ill health. They were the Diocese too. The Diocese wasn’t a separate entity. It was like one body and the churches were the limbs and the people were the fingers, toes, eyes, hair and eyelashes. The organists were...the organs. The Treasurers were the Toes. The Curates were the calves. Together all these bits made up the Diocese. Richard explained that when a portion of the money parishioners donate to their church goes to pay for Mission and Ministry Support at the Diocese, that support is actually for them, because, you’ve got it, they are the Diocese.

“How’s that different from the Diocesan Office?” asked Anna. “Well now, that’s a physical building, and the people who working in it serve the *Diocese*, that’s us. Try not to mix them up.” He said, a bit patronisingly. Anna told Richard that he was terribly clever and gave his arm a squeeze.

All of this information made Sarah, David, Mary and their friends feel surprised at first for having not thought of this themselves, then really happy because it meant if they were indeed the Diocese, then they could make suggestions and take part in Diocesan activities and events and feel part of a great big team. It meant they had a lot more in common with St Drogo’s down the road than they once thought, as they were the Diocese too. Who’d have imagined? Before they could dwell on this revelation further, Rev John came over with the visitor from the Diocesan Office and a tray bake and they all lived happily ever after. The end.