

## Diocesan Synod – Presidential Address

We are made by love, with love and for love.

So I want to say three things in this address tonight.

I want to say thank you for being here; I want to lay out some of what lies ahead; and I want to leave us with a challenge.

Firstly, thank you.

Thank you for being you and for being here. Whatever your background, you are a child of God. It's good to be one family under God together in this place.

Thank you for joining me in this new Diocesan Synod where we come together to deliberate and discern the way forward. In the Church of England we all play a part in how its run: bishops, clergy and laity. That means celebrating together, and sometimes challenging each other, under God. Sometimes we will pore over details and sometimes we will be trying to see the big picture. And we do that as brothers and sisters in Christ, with the one God our Father, remembering that especially when we disagree with someone's point of view.

Sometimes we'll discuss things which have been raised by individuals, such as the questions tonight. Sometimes items will come from Deanery Synods, such as the excellent motion on Sustainable Church Flowers from Kidderminster and Stourport. Sometimes General Synod, which includes people from every

diocese in England, will ask us to consider matters of national importance.

Sometimes we will work on things that feel bigger than any of us, like Climate Change. We all have a vital role to play, so thank you for being here together tonight.

Secondly, I wonder what lies ahead for us over the next three years?

There will be regular things that we attend to every year. The budget is one, as we seek to handle well the financial and human resources God has given us, and put them to the best possible use. Safeguarding is another as we seek to create a safer church where all can thrive and grow in faith.

Then there will be rare and unusual things like the vacancy in see as we await the appointment of a new Bishop of Worcester and President of this Synod, hopefully by Christmas 2025.

This process is already well underway, and we have already completed our part, with an extensive consultation producing a Diocesan Statement of Needs that you can find on our website.

It was agreed unanimously by the vacancy in see committee, a real achievement in itself, and they finished their work by electing 6 people to the Crown Nominations Commission. They will join six others from General Synod, along with Archbishop Justin and another senior bishop to shortlist and then interview

in June. If all goes well we hope to have our new diocesan bishop with us by Christmas next year.

Another subject for our term at synod is likely to be the next stage in the Living in Love and Faith process. The House of Bishops and General Synod have been working on their response to this for some time now. The Prayers of Love and Faith have been published and commended for use by the House of Bishops, but there is much work still to do, and Diocesan Synods are likely to be consulted again, probably next year. We live in a country where Civil Partnerships and Marriage between partners of the same or opposite sex have been legal for some years now. How then should we respond as the Church of England, practically, pastorally and liturgically? There will be different points of view in this room, and in the church as a whole.

It's important to be able to discuss such matters freely together, just as the church has had to do over other issues such as the ordination of women, or the abolition of slavery, where long held practices have been questioned and debated in the past. We do so remembering that all of us are children of God, all are precious in God's sight, whatever their view on this or any other matter.

Some matters we discuss will seem very church centred. Others, such as climate change affect every single person on our planet and they will form part of our agenda over the next three years, and rightly so.

Finally, a challenge.

We are made by love, with love for love.

As a synod we need to remember what lies at the heart of our calling. To love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus said, 'There are no commandments greater than these, and in these two commandments lie all the Law and the prophets.'

Our vision is to share the love of God in Jesus Christ with our neighbours in every town and village, every estate, new and old from Coseley to Bredon, from Stockton on Teme to Broadway. Our task is to bring people to God and God to people. We do this by becoming what we are called to be, the Body of Christ, where every person is valued, where every person, young or old, rich or poor, has an honoured place, and where each one of us has our own unique part to play. We are called to Grow as Kingdom People, living lives of love, compassion, justice and freedom, as we worship God, make disciples, transform communities and share hope.

We are called to grow the church in depth and in number, bringing people to God and God to people, in the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ. This is our Transformation journey as we seek to renew every church, double the number of children and young people, develop a hundred new worshipping communities alongside the old, and equip every church member for ministry. After many years of decline, last

year saw the number of people attending our churches go up. Confirmations are increasing, year on year. After years of fashionable atheism people are beginning to wonder again. Is life without God, or Britain without Christianity that attractive a prospect? What will happen to me when I die? What will lie ahead for my children and grandchildren if there are no Christians and no churches left in this land?

Friends, all of you are precious to God; all of you are leaders in this diocese. We have a gospel to proclaim!

God says in the prophets, 'Return to me and I will return to you'. Jesus says, 'Come to me, all those who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

We can't do this in our own strength. But with God all things are possible.

As we seek to bring people to God and God to people, our key task as a church, we remember that the first person we need to bring to God each day is ourself.

So let's do that now. As brothers in sisters in Christ, let us pray for ourselves and for this Synod and Diocese, in the words that Jesus taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and for give us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not**

**into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen**