

It was a great privilege last November to share with Synod the emerging vision and strategy for the Church of England in the 2020s. Since then Iâ€™ve had opportunities to speak with many individual members of Synod, in several dioceses, and to meet with other groups, not least the chairs of the House of Laity and the House of Clergy. Â

The three words â€˜simplerâ€™, â€˜humblerâ€™ and â€˜bolderâ€™ seem to have landed well. They capture something of the spirit of the Church God is calling us to become.

However, there is still much to do. This is a work in progress.

In this session I simply want to bring you up-to-date with how things are developing; give Synod an opportunity to ask questions; and share my hopes and dreams for this vision and for our Church of England.

But with hope there must also be realism and humility. This is a tough time for our nation and our world. We have seen so much suffering. Many of us are exhausted. And we donâ€™t know exactly what the Church is going to look like when we emerge from the lockdown and start to return to whatever the new normal will be.

We should, however, be proud of what we have achieved. Churches have been in the frontline of providing care and service in and with our communities. We have, amazingly, managed to do so much online and as a result new people have connected with us. We couldnâ€™t have imagined this a year ago.

Some of us will have come to this meeting troubled by stories in parts of the press implying that big decisions about clergy numbers, parishes, buildings and services have already been decided centrally but kept under wraps. Much of this has been rather misleading. Archbishop Justin and I have replied in the public domain so as to set the record straight but also, more importantly, keep the work on track. Do read what we have said.

But, Synod, I want to say again, this is a work in progress. It is my intention to be open and transparent about the full scope of the challenge and to find ways of working on this together. And our vision for being a Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped Church will help us focus on what truly matters: the Christ like life of prayer; our worship and our service; the proclamation of Godâ€™s good purposes for the world; and how all this is fed and nurtured by word and sacrament, and by our own humble acknowledgment of our need of Godâ€™s grace, so that, together, we can build a better, more hopeful future.

So here is the diagram I shared with you last time, and please note a slight change to the wording: we believe God is calling us to be *centred on Jesus Christ and shaped by Jesus Christ*. Â First and foremost, we are those who live our lives in Christ. And through Christ we enjoy community with God.

Iâ€™m also pleased that one of the first responses to the November Synod was an offer of help from Professor David Ford, Isabelle Hamley, Anderson Jeremiah (a member of Synod) and a few other theologians, who have offered to dig into these two phrases and the ideas and objectives that flow from them.

A well-known delaying tactic for any movement of change in the church is the charge that we havenâ€™t done the theology. I think in this instance I want to suggest that the change I am praying for *is the theology*. I am hoping that by saying clearly we are called to be followers of Jesus - a Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped church - we are calling for a theological and spiritual renewal in our church, and that this will lead to a developing emphasis on apologetics and catechesis and from that more effective evangelism.

I am also grateful for the many offers of prayer, and I am writing this week to a number of places of pilgrimage and communities of prayer asking for their prayerful support.

The phrase â€˜Jesus shapedâ€™ has a specific connection with the five marks of mission. These five marks, which I hope we will formally adopt later this year, describe a life lived in Christ and therefore form the heart of our first strategic objective which is to become a church of missionary disciples. This too, will overflow and bear fruit in our ministry to the world, enabling us to have a greater prophetic witness and developing what I want to call a narrative of hope. Some shoots of this can already be seen in things like the archbishopsâ€™ housing commission launched last week and in this Synodâ€™s bold environmental commitments. These all demonstrate the outward focus of our apostolic witness flowing from our life in Christ.

The *Setting Godâ€™s People Free* agenda will of course be central to this priority, shaping missionary discipleship in the whole of life, both as the â€˜gathered inâ€™ and the â€˜sent outâ€™ church.

Our second objective is to become a church where mixed ecology is the norm. This, I fear, has sometimes been misunderstood or misheard. I apologise if anything I have said, or failed to say, gave a false impression. However, it is categorically not about the dismantling of the parish system, but *a parish system revitalised for mission*.

It is our historic vocation to be the Church for every square inch of this country and every person in it. A mixed ecology church will be the way we achieve this in our current context, enabling every person to have an opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ and be part of his church. We will develop pathways into belonging and discipleship in the different areas that people actually live their lives, such as home; work/education; leisure; and digital.

And in order to do this we need priests - more priests! - who, with their bishops, will have oversight of the parishes, chaplaincies, new Christian communities, be they online or in person, that we will work to establish. It will also need a huge flourishing of lay ministry and lay leadership and many new ministers Â helping us develop new communities of faith. We want more church, not less.

Thirdly, we believe God is calling us to be younger and more diverse. We need to look like the communities we serve in all areas of age and diversity. And this does mean *all* areas of diversity; and it does mean believing in and supporting children and young people in ministry; and it does mean facing up to our own failings to welcome and include many under-represented groups, particularly people with disability, supporting the recent launch of the Anti-Racism Task Force, committing ourselves to the LLF process and our already agreed pastoral principles so that LGBTI+ people are in no doubt that they, along with everyone, are equally welcome in the Church of England.

Separate groups have been helping us work on these in each area. We are developing some ambitious outcomes that we will share with Synod.

Paradoxically, apart from the misunderstanding that somehow a mixed ecology church meant dismantling parishes – which it doesn't! – the most consistent criticism that I have encountered has not been about the central vision and its three objectives, but about *what hasn't been said*.

Whenever I get up to speak about the vision I am speaking primarily about the renewal of our life in Christ, the need to put Jesus at the centre, and the spiritual, theological and missiological objectives that flows from that. I am not talking about church buildings or clergy numbers or governance structures or even, for that matter, about balancing budgets. These things matter hugely. But they have not been the primary concern of this work.

However, as Synod knows, there have been *other* groups looking at these things. With hindsight, it might have been better to join the whole thing up at an earlier stage. So here is another diagram which does show the totality of our ambition and the full scope of the work before us. You can also find much of this on the Church of England's [website](#).

So, yes, to be a simpler and humbler and bolder the church will mean that we use our resources more effectively, and the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is leading a group that is looking at what this might mean, particularly for central and diocesan structures and services. The Bishop of Leeds is chairing a group on our governance, aiming to find a simpler, more coherent and joined up way of making decisions. And, yes, mindful that many dioceses are having to review their numbers of stipendiary clergy (though let me stress, these are decisions made in each diocese, not centrally) and mindful that we do want to ensure that resources go to frontline ministry, Archbishop Justin and I have invited the Bishop of Ely, Stephen Conway, Mark Sheard and Maggie Swinson to speak to every bishop in the Church of England to offer some advice on several aspects of episcopal ministry including possibilities for systemic and structural change.

Quite simply, this is a time when we need to look at how we order the whole of our life. This is painful. I'm not sure any of us really like it. I have certainly found myself on one or two occasions thinking wouldn't it have been easier to have become Archbishop of York in different and less challenging times. But let me say this to you: as we go about this work, my test is this: I want to be able to go to the poorest and most deprived parish of the northern province, meet a member of the congregation who faithfully and sacrificially gives each week to the ministry of the church, and be able to look them in the eye and assure them that we are spending those pounds she gives us wisely; that every penny is spent to serve the mission and the ministry of the church in the communities on the front line, and where there is necessary cost on central and diocesan structures and services we have reviewed our work as part of this whole determination to be a simpler, humble and bolder Christ centred and Jesus shaped church and believe that where it is spent on anything other than frontline ministry, it is only to provide the necessary and sometimes mandatory care, support and ongoing development and training. Or as Bishop Martin Seeley has memorably put it: *the front line is the bottom line*.

I don't think we are quite there yet. This isn't anybody's fault. But our structures have become complicated and cumbersome and I believe we can do better. I also believe that it is better to see this as *one piece of work shaped by one vision: to put Christ and our discipleship in Christ at the centre*. It's not that we have not done this in the past. Of course we have. But we need a fresh and radical call to a new springtime in our discipleship.

Finally, I've been reading Pope Francis's beautiful little book *Let Us Dream*. And since I am a bit of a dreamer myself (and hopefully stand in the good company of so many great biblical dreamers I want to finish by quoting what Pope Francis has to say about what he calls the *virus of indifference* which may get in the way of us seeking a hopeful, Christ centred future. One of the obstacles he identifies is pessimism. He notes how it is rife in western society, even amongst Christians, and with it a terrible cynicism. He says that to respond in this way is like shutting a door – on the future and the new things it can hold; a door you refuse to open in case one day there will be something new on your doorstep.

Sisters and brothers, in the New Testament, and indeed, throughout scripture, we often find the imagery of closed and open doors. Sentries are posted at the gates of Eden as Adam is cast out. Paul speaks about doors opening for the gospel. The book of Revelation portrays Christ as the one who knocks on the door of our hearts. Hosea says that even in the darkest places, doors of hope can be opened. And then there is the great vision in Revelation of an open door in heaven.

I believe that through this vision and these strategic objectives God is opening a door of hope for our Church of England, but even more importantly, for our nation. I believe that if we can be centred on Christ, if we are humbler and bolder about our life in Christ and the difference it makes; if our lives are shaped by the five marks of mission; if we become a younger and more diverse mixed ecology church of missionary disciples, then that will make a difference in our nation, not just feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, but voicing a Christian narrative of hope which can lead to a re-ordering of our national life where Christian values rooted in Christian belief is what shapes us.

But I want to give the last word to a member of Synod. She is a parish priest just starting in a new post. She wrote to me the other day. She doesn't know I'm quoting her, but her words sum up my hopes.

Reflecting on her new role in a multi-parish rural benefice, she writes –

“I feel I am called here to encourage a new way of being church, a way that enables and empowers the laity. A way of being church in a post-Covid world, which has to be a model fit for the 21st century. My hopes are that we will see a church emerge where mutual ministry is the default model (this) is necessary not simply to address the financial situation and the decrease in clergy numbers but because this is how we all live out our lives as disciples of Christ. We plan to create 5 teams from across the benefice to reflect the 5 marks of mission. My vision is a benefice (however large that may become) where collaborative ministry is a lived reality, where churches are growing and where people can find and receive God’s radical, unconditional love for themselves “ find it because it is visible!”

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