

Read the Archbishop's welcome speech at the inaugural session of the new General Synod, which was attended by HRH The Earl of Wessex who delivered a message on behalf of HM The Queen

Your Royal Highness, on behalf of the newly inaugurated General Synod of the Church of England it falls to me to express our heartfelt thanks, not only for your presence with us today, but also for conveying Her Majesty's warm words of encouragement and the assurance of her prayers for our work.

The work of prayer lies at the heart of all we Christians seek to do and be, as we try to faithfully follow Jesus Christ. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has already acknowledged, we are profoundly grateful for Her Majesty's steadfast example of Christian discipleship, service and love, lived out daily in her most remarkable reign.

The call to follow Jesus is one we as a Synod will always set before us so the Church of England may continue to serve the diverse communities of our land to the best of her ability. In a world that is changing more rapidly than ever before, that is a particular challenge as we seek to proclaim afresh the good news of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we believe Jesus is the human face of God; God coming to us and speaking to us in the language of a human life; and at the same time revealing to us, not only God, but what our humanity can and should be.

A church therefore which is centred on Jesus Christ will also be shaped by Jesus Christ. This is the heart of our vision, and through this we have big aspirations and plans to become a church of missionary disciples, a church that serves people and communities in all the spaces that they live, including the digital, and a younger and more diverse Church. We are resolved to do that by being simpler in our structures, humbler in the way we seek to serve, and bolder in bringing the grace and love of Jesus Christ to our communities, in our parishes, chaplaincies and expressions of church new and old alike.

If I may, allow me to quote Alfred Wainwright who himself enjoyed the breath taking beauty of the North of England which I now experience on a daily basis, though I also heard Billy Connolly make the same point: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes!" Something I am sure Your Royal Highness would agree with through your work championing the superb Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. As a church, we must not complain about the weather, saying things are against us in our culture, rather we need to find the right clothes and the right ways of reaching and serving people in all the many places that they live their lives.

With over 60% of new members, this synod, like its predecessors, will grapple with some of the most complex issues that together we face, not least that of the dangerously changing weather of climate change. As we ensure we are responsible stewards of God's creation, our commitment as a church to be carbon neutral by 2030 gathers pace, developing toolkits for our churches to measure their energy footprint and ensuring we widely consult across our parishes on reaching net zero. We remain committed to engaging and working with companies we are invested in, and continue to increase investment in renewable energy and low carbon technology. We always have the option to disinvest from any companies that are not taking seriously their responsibilities to transition to a low carbon economy, in line with our commitment to Synod. The recent COP 26 summit has reminded us just how pressing this work is.

As a church, we will continue to strive, value and welcome all people made in the image and likeness of God. To this end we will take action over important issues of justice and inclusion for people of global majority heritage and for those suffering in our poorest communities across the country. Likewise the Living in Love and Faith dialogue will continue with its vitally important conversations about human identity, gender and sexuality. The quality of our listening and the care with which we speak will be of the highest importance in demonstrating to the world and each other who we understand Jesus Christ to be.

Alongside these matters we will attend to the governance of the Church. Conscious of the historic failings over safeguarding, we will continue to respond with courage and humility to the IICSA recommendations, the need for good safeguarding and ensuring just and compassionate care for survivors of abuse.

We will look at clergy conduct and how the church continues to be equipped to be an effective Christian presence in every community in all our parishes, encouraging clergy and laity alike in their ministries. In addition we will debate issues of importance in our national life seeking always to place the example of the Good Shepherd before us.

As we sang moments ago in Westminster Abbey,

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way.

My prayer for this Synod is that the same love of Jesus Christ will radiate out from each of us, as we support important business in the life of our church, but also beyond these walls in the communities where God has called us to serve.

As we undertake all of these tasks I know we will continue to be inspired by Her Majesty's example of Christian living and service. We are thankful for her prayers, along with those of the whole church.

Your Royal Highness, please convey most warmly our prayers for Her Majesty as she lives out the vows and promises she made to serve our nation and Commonwealth nearly 70 years ago. May God continue to richly bless Her Majesty, and may he strengthen her and uphold all members of the Royal Family in his service.

Synod, may I invite you to stand as you are able, while His Royal Highness departs.

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