

The Archbishop delivered a speech in today's session of General Synod, saying farewell to the Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, who is due to retire from her role this month. His speech follows here...

As I begin this farewell, I'm conscious we might be witnessing a historical moment in the life of the General Synod. Why? Because this is actually Christine's second synod farewell, the other was given by my predecessor in July 2014. On that occasion, this body was thanking Christine for her 14 years on Synod and her role as Prolocutor of the Province of Canterbury and wishing her well for a long and happy retirement.

Well, it hasn't turned out like that. Christine doesn't make many mistakes, but maybe at this point, as the old joke has it - How do you make God laugh? Answer. Tell him your plans - Christine thought that she knew what the future held. But God had other ideas and eighteen short months later, Christine was consecrated Bishop of Newcastle, becoming the first female diocesan bishop in the Northern Province.

Of course, being first is something we have come to expect from Christine. She was among the first wave of women to be ordained to the priesthood in 1987, she was the first woman to serve as Prolocutor of the Province of Canterbury and the first female bishop to be a season ticket holder for Newcastle United.

Christine, I suspect they will still value your prayers for the rest of the season, even when you move away.

6 years as Bishop might not seem very long, but if anyone was an example of what a Bishop can achieve in relatively short amount of time, look no further than the Newcastle Diocese.

Christine, your ministry has been transformative. You have enabled the diocese to become much more outward facing, rooted in the reality of the circumstances it finds itself, whether that's a vibrant city, or the rural parishes with Hadrian's Wall weaving through them, or the liminal tranquillity of Holy Island with all its rich heritage, the inspiration and example of Aiden and place of pilgrimage.

Regardless of the location, the diocese is alive with a desire to reach and serve people where they are, and at whatever stage in life, and with the love of Jesus Christ and to be a place of hospitality and hope in a part of our country which is so often overlooked or suffering from continual lack of investment and opportunity.

You have also made a huge contribution to our national church life. You have served as a member of countless groups including the Steering Committee for women bishops legislation, Spending Plans Task Group, the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops Steering Committee to name but a few. All of them have benefited from your wisdom. In the past you often explained legislation to the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, now in the House of Lords you have scrutinised that legislation and always brought to this work great tenacity, faithfulness and a desire to get things done. And let's not forget the very important work of the Pastoral Advisory Group, which Christine has overseen in recent years. Born of some of the many struggles her generation faced as the legislation for the ordination of women as priests and then bishops made its way through the church, Christine has helped us see how we can honour, love and respect one another with our differences. And this tenacious and robust kindness is one of the greatest gifts she has given to the Church she loves.

Christine is nothing if not energetic. I'm reliably informed that most mornings begin with a run – I've been told whilst listening to Ed Sheeran, but I won't hold that against you. Well, not today.

Then it is Morning Prayer. And here as one of the pioneer generation of female priests and bishops, I want to pay tribute to your spiritual vision, your love of Christ and the way your life and ministry is sustained and replenished through your relationship with Christ in word and sacrament.

Your love for the outdoors is well known, although not always necessarily appreciated especially on a Bishop's staff residential which, I'm told, includes an obligatory walk or as it is more commonly known – "the Bishop's route march".

Christine, the diocese of Newcastle will miss you. The staff in your office will miss you. I know they have enjoyed teaching you the correct Geordie pronunciation for names of the parishes across the diocese. And you've learned those lessons so well and become such a valued part of the north east that the city of Newcastle honoured Christine recently by making her the first ever faith leader to be granted the freedom of the city.

Christine, this is the impact you have had, truly showing how the church can be the church for the entire nation, not just itself.

Christine, Newcastle and Northumbria, many relationships you've established across government, business and third sector partners, will miss you.

Colleagues across the Northern Province and indeed the entire College of Bishops will miss you. Your candour, intellect, spiritual and pastoral gifts have been such a blessing to the Church of England. On a certain BAP report many years ago, it stated that Christine would prove an asset to any parish staff! Well we can say a big Amen to that and after nearly 40 years of ministry, Christine has not just been an asset, but an absolutely remarkable presence in the life of the Church and to God's mission.

So Christine, for the second time, we wish you and Roger who has always been such a wise companion and support to you in your ministry, a really enjoyable retirement. Be assured of our love for you and our prayers as you shortly leave Newcastle - with walking boots, running shoes and bicycles close at hand. You leave with our richest blessings and thanks for a remarkable ministry.

And, please don't forget. You know this more than most. There will be more!

Smiling woman dressed in purple cassock holding a shepherd's crook

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