

The Archbishop today addressed General Synod on the Vision and Strategy for the Church of England on Mixed Ecology. The speech follows in full...

The vision for the Church of England in the 2020s is to become a Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped church, which means primarily a spiritual and theological renewal, deepening our prayer, delighting in worship, but also to be so challenged by our life in Christ that it overflows in loving service for the world.

Hence, the importance of putting the five marks of mission at the heart of what it means to live what the Anglican Communion calls a Jesus shaped life.

Three strategic priorities have emerged:

- to be a church of missionary disciples;
- to be a younger and more diverse church; and
- to be a church where mixed ecology is the norm in the ways we have just seen demonstrated in what is developing in the diocese of Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich but which might look very different in Leicester or Blackburn where there are different geographies, demographics, contexts and needs.

Starting today with mixed ecology, over the next few synods we will dig into these ideas, to learn from each other and see how they can help us move the Church of England into deeper and more sustained growth.

I'm sorry if some of this has not always been presented clearly and has caused some nervousness. Let me, then, try to be very clear: when we speak about mixed ecology, we are speaking about the whole ecosystem of the Church, not one way of being church replacing another.

The historic vocation of the Church of England is to be the church for everyone everywhere. We are the national Church. We want every person we serve to have an opportunity to encounter the transformation that a life centred on Jesus Christ can bring.

We therefore need to find ways of reaching and serving people in the very diverse circumstances and contexts of our national life today - in places of leisure, workplace and education as well as local neighbourhood. On line as well as in person. And we are getting quite good at that.

I understand this to be the revitalisation of parish, not its demise. And I note with joy the fact that it is already happening in many places. This is why our six bold outcomes seek a parish system revitalised for mission through a mixed ecology church creating new Christian communities across those four areas of home, work and education, social and digital where we live our lives.

And we are not firing the starting gun on something new. Much of this is already happening in parishes of all traditions. Rather, we are catching up with the work of the Holy Spirit who has already danced ahead of us and is blessing messy church, school chaplaincy and all sorts of online gatherings for prayer and discipleship.

There is also a theological and missiological imperative. We have been charged to make disciples of all nations and therefore all peoples and all cultures. One size won't fit all. It takes the whole world to know Christ. So at Pentecost the Holy Spirit doesn't get the whole world to speak one language, but gifts the church with the ability to speak every language.

From that point onwards, the story of Christian mission is a story of cultural adaptability as the unchanging message of what God has done in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection is translated into the constantly changing languages and cultures of human experience. (You can read about it in the New Testament!)

This work never stops. We are always moving into the uncharted territory of new cultures and new contexts.

Therefore, we want to see the ecosystem of the Church expressed in these ways –

- a viable, sustainable presence in every neighbourhood i.e. the parish church, and with a particular care for our poorest communities
- usually growing from that, new communities of faith and new expressions of Christian community, both online, but also in person: mission initiatives large and small, like messy church or after-school clubs or workplace chaplaincies, maybe even 10,000 of them
- we want to develop chaplaincy, and not just in schools, universities, prisons and hospitals, but sports and workplace chaplaincy, even shopping centres. This is an area of great opportunity.

Finally, we long to see a renewal of the religious life. Most movements of renewal in the Church have begun with a new experience of God and a new delight in prayer, worship and the sacramental life. There are signs that this is happening in small and unexpected ways. We want it to continue.

Our work as Synod is to understand and see what God is doing through this, make sure we are not left behind, and align our own resources centrally, and our training for the next generation of clergy and lay ministers, to this rediscovery of what it truly means to be the church with a mission to everyone: a mixed ecology.

Pope Francis has put it this way: "The church is a people with many faces, and expresses (its) truth in countless different ways, according to each culture."

He goes on; "That is why I like to think that evangelisation must always be in the dialect of each place, with the same words and sounds of the grandmother uses to sing lullabies to her grandchildren." [1](#)

This is a beautiful way of thinking about evangelism: singing the song of the gospel in the language of the people we serve. All of them. Everywhere. Especially those who are often excluded.

Yesterday we looked at the beginning of John 21. Let me finish at the end of that chapter, and therefore at the very end of John's Gospel itself.

John says that if everything that Jesus did was written down then the world itself couldn't contain all the books that would be written (John 21. 25). I don't think he just means writing down all the things that Jesus said and did in his ministry, but all the things that Jesus continues to do and say in the power of the Spirit through his Church, that is through us. We are called to live and tell Christ's story, recognising that in order to reach everyone everywhere we need to become – as we've really always been - a mixed ecology church.

This, of course, is still a church under the oversight of bishops and synods, and with parish clergy having the cure of souls. None of this changes. But the whole point of the cure of souls is that it refers to everyone in the parish not just a gathered congregation.

It is for the re-expression and revitalisation of this vision that I invite us to consider how we can align our resources to enable the church to flourish in many different ways and the gospel of Jesus Christ to be made known. I look forward to your comments and questions.

- 1 Pope Francis, Let Us Dream; The path to a better future, Pg. 105

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/speaking-and-writing/sermons/vision-and-strategy-address-general-synod-november-2021>