

*At General Synod the Archbishop gave the farewell to Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool who retires this month. His speech follows in full...*

Some years ago, when Bishop Paul was the Church of England's national officer for evangelism, I attended a talk he was giving on the subject of how we might share our faith with those outside the Christian community. These were still the days of overhead projectors, and the first slide was a cartoon.

A slightly timid looking man was opening his front door and looking out to see who it was who had knocked.

On the doorstep are two ducks. They are addressing the man.

Underneath the caption read: "Excuse us for bothering you this evening, sir, but have you ever thought about becoming a duck?"

It was a wonderful way of illustrating the gap, or might we even say the gulf, between those of us who are embedded in the Christian culture and those who are not, and just how extravagantly weird it feels to be invited from one culture and one set of values into another.

But this cartoon, for me, also expresses all that is good and arresting and challenging - and often provocatively uncomfortable - about the witness and the joyful ministry of the "just about to retire" Bishop of Liverpool, Paul Bayes.

Paul is passionate to share the gospel with those who do not know it; passionate for the church to understand how it feels to not know and understand Christian language and Christian culture, and Paul has a great heart for those who are excluded, marginalised and left behind by the church where our ways not only seem alien, but sometimes deliberately excluding.

Throughout his ministry, Paul has been a champion for the gospel and a champion for the rights and dignity of those who sometimes find themselves left outside.

In particular, it is no secret that Paul has been a great advocate for championing LGBTI+ voices and we have seen that here on the floor of Synod, in the House of Bishops, in the diocese of Liverpool and in the public square.

Paul, you know that this has not always made you popular, yet that has not deterred you from speaking with passion, conviction and determination, often at personal cost. But always, your passion is shot through with a gentleness of spirit and with kindness, for we know that you care for every bit of the Church and long for our unity as well as our greater inclusion.

Your desire to reach out across traditions and to work for unity and inclusion is wonderfully demonstrated here today, by our friends from the Anglican Communion (in the balcony) who are representing the "Triangle of Hope" initiative between the Diocese of Liverpool, the Diocese of Kumasi in Ghana and the Diocese of Virginia (USA).

This initiative remembers the horrors and treatment of slaves, in each of the dioceses, viewing this period with great pain and penitence before God, whilst standing together to fight the blight of modern slavery and human trafficking as we have discussed in this synod. Â Synod, do join me in showing our welcome to our guests today. Â Â

Like me, Paul was ordained young, aged 25. He served his curacy in Newcastle Diocese; then went to be an ecumenical university chaplain here in London before moving to High Wycombe, once the chair making capital of the world. During his time in High Wycombe, rather than simply re-arrange the chairs, Paul got stuck in to the challenges and opportunities of multi-parish benefice ministry. From there, he went to Winchester before becoming the National Mission and Evangelism Advisor for the Archbishopsâ Council. Â It was in this role that Paul was instrumental in focusing the Church's attention on evangelism in new ways and staff in the NCIs still remember Paul with great affection, not least him dressing up as Father Christmas each year.Â

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On becoming Bishop of Hertford in St Albans Diocese, colleagues speak very warmly of your pastoral ministry as well as your ministry as a communicator; and your communication skills have recently, but only very briefly been put to use in the House of Lords where it must be some record for the shortest tenure of a bishop for some time.

One of your colleagues has written this about you Paul and I think we need to hear these wordsâ

âPaul has always shared his episcopae! Â We are always colleagues and friends. Â He has enabled us to walk alongside him, encouraging answers and solutions. We work with him, not for him.â

Paul, in your inaugural sermon in Liverpool Cathedral in 2014, you spoke about the call of the gospel using the image of a table: a table which has been set where there is a place for everyone. This caught the imagination of the people of the diocese and is still talked about today.

Everyone welcome. Everyone with a place. In fact, you were so determined to include everyone, and especially the underdog and the excluded that when as Bishop of Liverpool you were asked the dreaded question, which football team do you support, are you âredâ or âblueâ, Â you replied, âOrmskirk West End!â

So as this chapter comes to an end, we wish you and Kate and your family, who have given you such support in ministry, a really happy retirement.

I'm not going to make a comment on the âstonkingâ beard (a word often used by Paul) that until recently was on display, and you will have seen in some of the photos.Â

Paul, I hope you know the high regard in which you are held by the Church you have served so well and we thank you for giving the best years of your life in the service of the gospel, and especially in these latter years to the fantastic diocese of Liverpool.

Thank you for your friendship, wisdom and kindness, for your prophetic voice in the life of our Church. You move on now with our richest blessings and our heartfelt thanks.

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Man in purple cassock adding an ash cross to the forehead of a woman on a high street

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