

Sisters and brothers, it is my happy privilege to offer a heartfelt thank you to Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn.Â

I first encountered Julian, when new to Synod, 12 years ago. He was a very able Chair of the Business Committee, steering this Synod through all kinds of issues with a cool head, a deft administrative touch and a heart which very evidently was in the right place, wanting only to serve the Church and help it be better at witnessing to Jesus.

Those same skills that made him such a good Business Committee Chair have now been the foundation of so much joy, missional endeavour, and creativity in the wonderful diocese of Blackburn where he has served for nearly 10 years.Â

Julian's journey to ministry began at Ridley Hall, Cambridge. He was a curate in London, before moving further south to Chichester. He then served in Guildford diocese for 20 years, where notwithstanding the busy demands of parish life and duty as an Archdeacon, Julian committed himself to a number of other roles - Mayor's chaplain, chair of the Penal Affairs Group and the Housing Advisory Committee plus the Diocesan Advisor for Paranormal enquiries!Â

When writing a reference for Julian many years ago, an ecumenical colleague said this, "We have been waiting to hear where Julian might be called next. Archdeacon or Bishop?"

Well, it turned out it was both!Â

And since 2013, when Julian became Bishop of Blackburn, he has worked tirelessly to shape the narrative and vision of the Diocese in reaching people across Lancashire.Â

Just recently I was able to visit the diocese and experience at first hand the great work that is taking place.

Three things struck me in particular -

1. First, an unwavering and joyful focus on evangelism and witness

2. Secondly, a high doctrine of mutual flourishing

3. Third, a bias for the poor.

Tremendous things and tremendous for me to be alongside a diocese so clear on its gospel priorities. All this culminated in a wonderful Saturday night evangelistic event at the Tower Gardens in Blackpool, but along the way in three full days, I had been praying on the streets, visiting the University in Lancaster, spending time with civic leaders in Burnley, and witnessing the renewal of the Retreat Centre at Whalley Abbey.

Julian, as the Diocese looks forward to celebrating its centenary in 2026, I want you to know that we know the time and energy you have invested will continue to bear fruit. In fact, a recent diocesan consultation showed parishes overwhelmingly energised to continue in the work which you have led and embedded.Â

Julian, you are respected by those who hold a diversity of theological views. You are at ease establishing good relationships with civic and other faith leaders. You have that particularly useful skill - empathy - whilst maintaining the correct level of objectivity.Â

Your continued leadership and ministry with the Church of England Evangelical Council is hugely valued. You haven't been afraid to hold firmly to your views, but always with sensitivity, and always listening to others. I know there are many members of clergy within the CEEC have also been immensely grateful for your pastoral care. Â

â

And all this with humour and kindness. You don't take yourself too seriously, but you do take the gospel of Jesus Christ very seriously indeed, and with a confident joyfulness. Colleagues talk fondly that you regularly tease them with your observational insights. And although I unfortunately don't have photographic evidence, I understand during the Northern Bishops Mission in 2016, you confidently waltzed your way across the dancefloor at the Tower Ballroom in Blackpool.Â

But you are also known for your integrity. When playing the familiar game, Two Truths and a Lie, you were I am told the worst competitor ever. And on one occasion, preaching at Sandringham, you confessed to Her Majesty your recent attendance on a Speed Awareness Course.Â

Despite being a self-identified Southerner, you have been adopted by the North - not least for your deep desire to champion the North West. In your final speech in the House of Lords, you reminded the government of the importance of Levelling Up, and how vital it is to bring equality and opportunity to the regions that we have served. In response, a fellow peer remarked, "the Lord Bishop of Blackburn is genuinely humble and totally determined. He really does live his faith."Â

Synod, we say Amen to that!

Throughout your ministry you have had many supporters. However, today we want to extend particular thanks to your wife, Heather and your two children. We want them to know how much we appreciate the love and support they have given you and the good things that have happened because of that in making Christ known.

Julian, as you leave the red rose county of Lancashire, I note your recent comment to the clergy you serve - that whenever you leave a place as a priest or a bishop, a bit of your heart remains.Â

You go with our warmest wishes, our thanks and our prayers. And thank you for giving your heart to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to service of the Church of England in this land. We have no doubt of your continued faithfulness and that God will continue to use you in many ways to make Christ known.Â

But at the end of this chapter we simply say thank you and God speed.

Â



5 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/speaking-and-writing/sermons/general-synod-farewell-bishop-blackburn-julian-henderson>