



Archbishop Stephen addressed York Diocesan Synod today. The address follows in full

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On Wednesday this week, I visited the chaplaincy at York University.

I joined the Anglican and Roman Catholic chaplains for a short service of midday prayer, lunch, and an hour's discussion with a group of students who are involved in the life of the Church on the campus. The question was posed – to me and the other clergy present – what gave us hope for the Church at the moment.

I won't share my answer with you. It was boringly predictable. But the Roman Catholic Chaplain said that what gave him hope was this very group of students, who had chosen to follow the path of Christ, and were seeking – and here I am using our language – to live Christ's story in their daily lives, and across the university.

It's easy to beat ourselves up at the moment. As we know, most of our graphs are going in the wrong direction. Dwindling congregations and dwindling finances. But what he was pointing to is that however large or small the church is, in our culture there's virtually no one left who goes to church because it's the 'done thing to do', or because someone has told them to, or because it's somehow part of an Englishness they aspire to. If you are part of the Church today – especially as a young person – you are here, because you have chosen to be here, and you are consciously seeking after the way of Christ, and want to fashion your life after the example of Christ. This may not give us great, numerical strength, or the fatter bank balances we naturally crave. But it does give us spiritual strength and spiritual resilience, which is why – I hope – that the whole notion of living Christ's story has begun to capture the imagination of the diocese as we reimagine ourselves, our worship and our witness, as living out the story of Christ for the communities we serve, and for our wider world. It is a narrative of hope. The narrative of hope the world needs.

Of course, we want more people to join us and therefore we fearlessly seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ wherever the opportunity presents itself, but we also reckon that what really matters is our faithfulness, and from that we trust there will be fruitfulness as well. But all in due season.

It is what we will all get used to call 'revitalised growth', a steady pattern and an intentional investment in revitalising and putting new heart into our parishes and therefore into our local communities. And it's great to welcome Sam Nicol to the diocese as our new Director of Strategic Transformation, an externally funded post to help us make our plans a reality, along with Bishop Eleanor, the new Bishop of Hull, and Dominic Barrington, new Dean of York, for this their first Diocesan Synod.

The big decisions before us today will shape both the trajectory, the shape, and maybe most important of all, the underlying values and spirit of what it means to be a Christian and a Christian community in the diocese of York over the next 10 years or so.

I am hugely grateful for the work that has been done in the deaneries, and particularly want to take this opportunity of thanking the Area and Lay Deans and others involved in deanery synods for helping us get to this point where we are making decisions about the big picture of how we see our life in Christ developing and going forward. I also want to pay tribute to my colleagues in the York Diocesan Leadership team, and particularly

to our archdeacons, who have been working alongside the deaneries and parishes to bring us a plan, which is both challenging, soberingly realistic, but also shot through with hope: that if we do find ways of committing ourselves to be more like Christ; to reach those who do not yet know Christ; to grow churches of missionary disciples; and to transform our structures and finances in such a way that all our resources go towards this end of enabling every church to live Christ's story, and every Christian to discover the part that they have to play in God's mission of love to the world.

And flowing from that 'becoming more Christlike and being missionary disciples ourselves' vision, so today we also look at issues of inclusion, racial justice and climate justice. I am hugely encouraged that we are introducing a Racial Justice Charter for the diocese. And with COP27 fresh in our minds we will be hearing from our Green Ambassador about our own Diocesan engagement with the challenges of our worsening climate emergency.

I am also mindful that in the wider church the discussions about Living in Love and Faith will move in 2023 towards the process of decision-making. On that topic, let me make it clear that whatever proposals are brought forward, I will be entirely committed to finding a way in which we can honour every person made in the image of God, and at the same time hold together the unity of God's Church in this Diocese and across the Church of England, even with our conscientiously held disagreements. Indeed, in a world where disagreement so often leads to division, and division to conflict, what a message of reconciling love this could be.

With all of this could I ask all Diocesan Synod members to take responsibility for communicating these things back to our deaneries and parishes. Thank you.

Also, on Wednesday, before I drove over to the University, Ian McIntosh and Sammi Tooze came to see me so that we could discuss the heart of the Living Christ's Story agenda, which is Becoming More Like Christ.

In the New Year, I will be holding five open evenings around the diocese to speak about Living Christ's Story, giving, I hope, anyone and everyone an opportunity to meet me, to pray together, and to ask their questions.

In Lent, with colleagues in the diocese, we will be presenting a series of recorded sessions and webinars about how we can live and work together across the diocese in all our parishes, schools and communities by sharing a simple rhythm of life. This is not, I hasten to add, a new initiative. Rather, it recalls us to our primary vocation to be people of prayer, people who gather around the Word, people who worship God, and people who let these things overflow into every part of our life, shaping who we are and therefore shaping the world around us. Please watch this space.

Finally, my prayer is that today we will take a deep breath and then commit ourselves to the outworking of the Living Christ's Story agenda. Principles and a direction of travel have already been agreed. Now we agree to turn them into challenging action.

Let us remember, the choice is not between changing or staying the same. But between being the architects of change or its victim.

I believe that under God and guided by the Spirit, and following much discussion across the deaneries, and listening carefully to the feedback

from many parishes, we now have a plan that can lead us to a sustainable and flourishing future; for the single purpose of living, faithful, Christian lives ourselves and sharing the life giving gospel of Christ with others.

Come Holy Spirit. Lead us and guide us.

6 min read

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