

THE BISHOP OF ST ALBANS' PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS DIOCESAN SYNOD OCTOBER 2014

I want to address four areas this morning which affect our common life as a diocese.

Firstly, at our meeting in July the General Synod agreed a way forward to enable the consecration of women to the episcopate. The matter was laid before the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament later that month who deemed that it was expedient. It was debated in the House of Lords on the 14th October and received approval. It now has to go before the House of Commons but as yet no date has been set. The measure will then receive Royal Assent. A meeting of the General Synod has been called for 17th November so that the measure can be promulgated. After that, the way will be open for women to be considered for episcopal posts in the same way that men can be.

I know that many of you share my delight at this development and look forward to the day when women can play their part at every level of the church's life. I am also aware that there are some who, in good conscience, do not welcome this development. I held a meeting in the Cathedral on 9th September to talk with any who were concerned about this subject and I assured them that whatever their views on this matter they will continue to be full and valued members of our diocesan family.

I reminded them, as I wish to remind you today, that the decision taken at General Synod in July was on the basis of five guiding principles which we agreed to honour. These guiding principles are attached as an appendix to the text of this address, a copy of which is available to every one of you as you leave. Please read them carefully.

Second, the General Synod has accepted the recommendation of the Pilling Report that we should embark upon a series of 'shared conversations' on 'Scripture, Mission and Human Sexuality'. The College of Bishops started this process over a two day period in mid-September. The second phase will involve groups of people from each diocese who will share in one of a series of conversations, each of which will take place over a thirty-six hour period. Details are still being finalised but it is currently proposed that our twelve diocesan delegates should join others from the dioceses of Oxford and Salisbury.

I am asking the chairs of the house of laity and the house of clergy of the synod to work with two members of Bishop's Council to identify twelve people who will be invited to attend. There will be a mixture of male and female, a good range of ages and also people who identify themselves as members of the LGBTI community.

The third phase of the shared conversations will involve the whole General Synod at our meeting in York next July.

Third, a word about vocations and finance. As well as the work we are undertaking on the vocation of all Christian people, we have also set out to increase the number of Readers and clergy, both self-supporting and stipendiary. It is encouraging that the numbers being trained, authorised and ordained, are increasing and that those offering included a much wider age range than in the recent past. We will need to continue this initiative with prayer and a real sense of urgency as the projections indicate that the number of people in active authorised ministry is still due to decline.

The other side of this is that the only way we can train more people is if the parishes – and that means me and you – are able to and willing to give generously and sacrificially to pay for it. I want to thank and pay tribute to all those who have been transforming our finances as a diocese. It has been a terrific achievement. We need to keep thanking all those who are enabling the work not only to continue but also to grow.

Finally, I am glad to announce that the Archbishop of Canterbury has responded positively to my invitation to visit the diocese and he will be with us from the 18-20 June next year. He will be visiting various parts of the diocese and we will be giving you details of the programme shortly. Meanwhile, please put the dates in your diaries and pray for the visit that it may strengthen us as we take forward *Living God's Love*.

+Alan St Albans

Appendix: Statement of guiding principles

1. The House reaffirms the five guiding principles which it first commended in May 2013 when submitting legislative proposals to the General Synod for the consecration of women to the episcopate and which the Synod welcomed in its resolution of 20 November 2013. They need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively:

a. Now that legislation has been passed to enable women to become bishops the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are the true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and thus deserve due respect and canonical obedience;

b. Anyone who ministers within the Church of England must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on the matter;

c. Since it continues to share the historic episcopate with other Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and those provinces of the Anglican Communion which continue to ordain only men as priests or bishops, the Church of England acknowledges that its own clear decision on ministry and gender is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God;

d. Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures; and

e. Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England.