

THE BISHOP OF ST ALBANS' PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DIOCESAN SYNOD

16 JUNE 2018

You will be pleased to know that this will be a fairly brief presidential address this morning as we come to the end of this triennium of the Diocesan Synod. I want to reflect on what we've done over the past three years as a synod and also to make a few comments on where we are as a diocese. It has been a busy triennium.

- The first meeting took place in October 2015 when we reviewed *Living God's Love*. We agreed to continue it but to develop and to tweak what we are doing. If you go back to the minutes you will see that we are still working on the basis that the bread and butter of our mission and ministry is what goes on in our parishes, our chaplaincies and our schools. We believe that the weekly Sunday worship, the pastoral care in our parishes (rooted in the occasional offices) and our work with schools and other community groups is still of vital importance. It is on this that we spend the vast majority of our money and in which we deploy the vast majority of our people. However, we are aware that we need to keep reviewing what we are doing and trying to improve how we do it. This is why there has been a special focus on improving the quality of our worship, encouraging youth and children's work, and developing Fresh Expressions of church.
- We have fulfilled our statutory responsibilities of overseeing our diocesan finances by scrutinising and agreeing the final budgets and accounts. This is a good opportunity for me to thank and to pay tribute to all those who have had a special responsibility for finance, both in the parishes and those who work at Holywell Lodge. I know it has not been an easy time, not least because we continue to maintain our clergy numbers and we have increased the numbers of ordinands, both of which mean we have had to push hard on stewardship. Consequently we have had to make some very tough decisions about central costs and we will continue to keep these under review. Please will you go back to your parishes and thank people for their generosity.
- We have also undertaken various essential pieces of 'housekeeping' business, such as overseeing the changes in the constitutions for the Boards of Mission, Ministry and Education; we've undertaken work on safeguarding, and extended our links with some of our overseas companions.

- Then, during the past three years, we have addressed a number of ministry issues, such as our Lay Ministry Strategy, more effective use of the occasional offices, and celebrating the ministry of Readers.
- When you go through the minutes of our Diocesan Synod meetings, you will see that we have had debates on a number of areas under the theme of 'transforming communities', such as those on the environment, the Refugee Crisis and today's debate on gambling.

It's been a full and busy Synod, so thank you all for your contributions over these past three years.

Looking to the future, this autumn is likely to be dominated by events marking the centenary of the Armistice and, as I said in my last Presidential Address, we need to plan carefully and maximise these opportunities. Working with local groups, such as the Royal British Legion and parish councils, this is a good way to keep the church at the heart of our local communities.

I also want to mention the 2020 Lambeth Conference, which will take place from 24th July to 3rd August. We are still at an early stage of planning. All English dioceses are being asked to host overseas bishops and their spouses, not only those with which they already have formal diocesan relationships, but also hosting those bishops who do not have a UK link. Our thinking at this stage is that it would be a wonderful opportunity to host quite a few bishops in different parts of the diocese, perhaps inviting them to share in parish or deanery missions. What better way to learn from the worldwide Anglican Church than from its leaders, who will be coming here as our guests. Please have a think about these opportunities in your parishes, schools, chaplaincies and deaneries and see if there are ways in which you would like to be involved.

Finally, elections to the next Diocesan Synod are now underway and have to be completed by 15th July. Many of you, I know, will be standing for election again and we look forward to seeing you at the next meeting of the Synod in October. May I also encourage you to consider who else might be invited to stand for election and, in particular, it would be good if there were people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, who would bring us even greater diversity and fresh insights. For those of you who have decided not to stand again, may I thank you for your contributions over the past Synods.