

THE BISHOP OF ST ALBANS' PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DIOCESAN SYNOD

14 MARCH 2020

This morning's Presidential Address is going to range widely, picking up on five disparate subjects, although I'd like to suggest that what they have in common is the invitation to listen attentively. You will be aware that one of the themes that crops up all over the Bible is the call not only to listen but to hear. It's first found in the Book of Deuteronomy (29.4) where Moses says that the people of God have ears but do not hear. The psalmist (Psalm 115:6 and 135.17), Jeremiah (26.11) and Ezekiel (12.2) echo the same idea. Jesus also invites those who have ears to hear (Mark 4.9 and 4.23). Finally, in the Book of Revelation, we come across the refrain after each of the letters to the churches "Let he who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying".

This morning I am going to speak about:

- The Environment
- The Lambeth Conference
- The Pastoral Principles
- Coronavirus
- The Big Conversation

The Environment

In my Presidential Address last October I spoke about *Caring for God's Creation*, ending with a series of suggestions for practical actions, including:

- Shrinking the Footprint – the Church of England's national environment campaign;
- Observing the season of Creationtide, which runs from 1 September to 4 October, when we give a particular focus to creation;
- Joining in with 'Letters for Creation', which is the project which brings together young people from across the Anglican Communion to pray, speak and act on climate change;
- Becoming an Eco Church and Eco Diocese; and
- Reading this year's Archbishop's Lent Book: *'Saying Yes to Life'* by Ruth Valerio.

Last month the General Synod of the Church of England held a debate on the climate emergency and passed a motion committing us to reach 'Net Zero' carbon emissions by 2030. An amended motion was later passed, which read as follows:

That this Synod, recognising that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation, and a fundamental injustice, and following the call of the Anglican Communion in ACC Resolutions A17.05 and A17.06:

(a) Call upon all parts of the Church of England, including parishes, BMOs, education institutions, dioceses, cathedrals and the NCIs, to work to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions and urgently examine what would be required to reach net zero emissions by 2030 in order that a plan of action can be drawn up to achieve that target;

(b) Request reports on progress from the Environment Working Group and the NCIs every 3 years beginning 2022 and;

(c) Call on each Diocesan Synod and Cathedral Chapter to address progress toward net zero emissions every 3 years.

'Net zero' requires deep reductions in emissions, with any remaining sources offset by removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere (e.g. by afforestation). Net emissions, after accounting for removals, must be reduced by 100% to zero.

I may disappoint some of you by explaining that I did not vote for this motion, not because I don't want to see a radical shift to lower our carbon emissions, but because I felt I could not vote for an un-costed motion which few people think we can possibly achieve. I was quite clear that I wanted to bring the motion back to this Diocesan Synod and over the next few months see what we can realistically do.

It is going to be a very major challenge. We have over 400 church buildings, hundreds of church halls, 250 vicarages, 138 church schools (over which we have only limited influence) and our diocesan offices, all of which will need to be carbon neutral in just under ten years. Much of this will inevitably fall on the parishes, as the greatest challenge by far is how to make our church buildings, many of which are listed and medieval, carbon neutral. At the moment we do not even have the tools to measure our current carbon footprint, although there is an online tool to help us: www.churchofengland.org/energy-footprinting-tool

As you saw in the motion, the 2030 target is for the whole Church, and General Synod has called on Diocesan Synods to address local progress towards this overall target at least every three years. The national Environmental Working Group will report to General Synod every three years, beginning in 2022. I am grateful for the challenge that we have been given. Now we need to get the subject onto the agendas of our PCCs, Deanery Synods, school governors and our diocesan boards and committees.

The Lambeth Conference will run from 24 July to 3 August. Twenty-one bishops and their spouses have accepted our invitation to spend a week in the diocese beforehand and each one has been allocated to a different deanery. They will arrive on Wednesday 15 July. On Thursday 16 July, the Diocesan Mothers' Union is hosting a day for bishops' spouses in Hitchin. We invite all parishes to be represented at the

event. From Thursday 16 July to Sunday 19 July, each Deanery will organise a programme for their guests.

On Monday 20 July there will be a Study Day at Venue 360 in Luton, facilitated by Professor David and Dr Deborah Ford. In the evening our guests will be hosted at a dinner to be held at Hatfield House.

From 10.30am until lunch on Tuesday 21 July we will bring the bishops together for a Reflection Day in St Albans. They will have a free afternoon to visit the city, concluding with Evensong in the Cathedral at 5.00pm, followed by a dinner.

Stephen Lyon is co-ordinating the programme (stephenplyon@gmail.com)

Living in Love and Faith

The *Living in Love and Faith* project is planning to publish a range of resources for the church in June this year, in time for the Lambeth Conference. The work has been led by a co-ordinating group and has sub-groups looking at Biblical Studies, Theology, History, and the Social and Biological Sciences. Accompanying those resources are *The Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together*, as well as video clips and other material, which listens to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people. We will provide resources and advice for PCCs and Deanery Synod in the autumn on how to use the material.

Coronavirus

We are receiving excellent medical and scientific advice, which is published on the Church of England website and is being updated regularly. In particular, you may be aware that we have recommended that for the time being we only receive communion in one kind (that is bread/wafer/host), and we refrain from shaking hands in church, including sharing the Peace. I commend this advice to you.

Having said that, I've also produced four Golden Rules about how we might live as Christians during this epidemic:

a. Golden Rule One: Love your neighbour. Much of the public rhetoric is sowing fear about the danger of other people. So, taking all the official precautions, offer help and reassurance to others – and don't demonise anyone or any group. In particular, think about how we can protect and support our neighbours.

b. Golden Rule Two: Take special care of the vulnerable. Think about those who may be suffering the most. For those of us who are healthy, there is much less to worry about but the elderly, the housebound and those with chronic health conditions may be very anxious. How about each congregation undertaking an audit of all the vulnerable people they know and sharing out the responsibility to phone them each

day? There's nothing like a friendly voice to offer solace when someone is worried. A smile can bring cheer, even on the phone. If you visit, follow all the official precautions or don't go.

c. Golden Rule Three: Don't give into panic and hoard food and hand gel. There is plenty to go round, so practise the Christian discipline of sharing. Ask your neighbours what they need and do your best to help them obtain it. If you are self-isolating you will, of course, need some supplies.

d. Golden Rule Four: Live today to the full. None of us ever knows what the future holds. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6. 25 – 34), Jesus challenged his followers to live each day fully and not be afraid. Every time we are tempted to give in to fear we need to make a conscious choice to respond in trust and openness.

The Revd Louise Collins, a Team Vicar in Borehamwood, has written this very helpful prayer:

*Dear God, our Shield and our Defender,
guide and protect my neighbour in this time of health emergency;
deliver them from all harm
and may your love and care ever grow in this place;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

The Big Conversation

The Big Conversation is now underway across the diocese. We have trained up a group of people to visit in pairs every PCC over the next few months. The aim is to have a creative conversation about how we can 'grow younger'. Please encourage everyone to read the content at the following link, which also features the excellent trailer for our film about the Big Conversation: <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/a-big-conversation-is-coming-to-your-parish/>

Of course, human plans alone are unlikely to achieve much, so please pray for this process daily.

Finally, I'd like to invite as many of you as possible to join me at the collation of the Revd Canon Jane Mainwaring as the new Archdeacon of St Albans this afternoon at 2.00pm at St Mary's Church in Hemel Hempstead.

+Alan St Albans
March 2020