

Bishop's Address to Diocesan Synod

Dear Friends, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address this newly elected Synod after a little over a 100 days among you as your new Bishop. I hope to offer some first impressions as I have experienced the life of Diocese as well as to reflect on how we might approach this next season of ministry as we continue *'joining together in the transforming mission of God.'*

The first and most important thing to say is a huge THANK YOU, especially for the kindness of your welcome to me, Sarah and the boys. We are delighted to be here.

On the day of my Inauguration and Enthronement at the Minster one member of our family was delighted to spot this sign on a shop window in Southwell. I hope this generous expression of welcome resulted in plenty of good custom too!

Travelling around the diocese, I have seen first-hand how you express the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ in your commitment to welcome all people.

This was the message St Christopher's in Sneinton was seeking to communicate through the design and commissioning of new doors to their church building, which I dedicated at the beginning of July.



Bishop Paul Williams with his wife Sarah and sons Joseph, Thomas and Edward



A sign in a shop window in Southwell in the run-up to the Inauguration at Southwell Minster



Bishop Paul Williams with the Revd Naomi Hill at the dedication of new doors at St Christopher's Church in Sneinton

The Christ-like commitment to express God's welcome also underpins your approach to social justice. This was tangibly clear in the number of Christians who joined the Vigil in the Market Square, Nottingham, back in September, declaring that we will do all we can to care for and welcome Refugees fleeing some immensely troubled parts of the world.

Thank you for every way you express the radical generosity of God's welcome in your lives and the mission of God's church.

I simply ask one thing of you at my first Synod: please will you continue to pray for me. I know that you have been doing so these past nine months, even before you knew the name of your new bishop. We feel that we have been surfing on the wave of your prayers.



Bishop Paul Williams at the refugee vigil in Nottingham

Your prayers will continue to be a vital source of encouragement as I go on listening and discerning the work of the Spirit among us and exercise my leadership in mission with you. If Paul felt the desperate need to urge that the Christians in Ephesus (6:18) pray for him, then I am certain I cannot hope to fulfil my calling to be your bishop without your prayers.

"Pray for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel..."
Ephesians 6:18



I am also praying for you, which I consider to be my chief privilege as your bishop. Paul's prayer for the Philippians has been especially on my heart that we would know the joy of being partners together in the gospel.

"In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ."
Philippians 1:4-5



As I thank God for you there are three things about the character of this diocese which are unmistakable:

You have a big heart for God's World. You are already making such a difference in diverse communities across the County, caring for the needs of people around you and determined to help create a more just society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to flourish.

You have a realistic appraisal of the challenges facing the church today, especially when it comes to reaching 1.1m people with the invitation to know Jesus. In various conversations over the past few months I have been moved hearing people describe their hopes and dreams for how we might grow the church in order to make a bigger difference in the world.

You have a joy in the journey, particularly when it comes to telling the stories of people finding new purpose and love in following Christ Jesus as Lord.

What do I bring as I join you in the transforming mission of God? I bring myself, with my experiences, my gifts and my energy, but also my weaknesses and own vulnerabilities. Please bear with me and remember that I am a jar of clay, but the treasure within us all is the unfading glory of Christ.

There are three core convictions that I cannot hide from you, which I first expressed in my Inauguration Address. They are also amplified in the Archbishop's mandate to me at the Confirmation of my Election in York. God's mission is not something we have to work out, it is given to us, entrusted to us. Our part is to pass it on. Which includes discerning how we continue drawing together all the diverse gifts God has lavished on His church so that we take every opportunity the Holy Spirit sets before us in the coming days.

Thanking God that you have...

- **A big Heart for God's World**
- **Realistic appraisal of the challenge**
- **Joy in the Journey** especially when it comes to the stories of lives being changed by Jesus

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Bishop Paul Williams on a prayer walk in the River Idle Benefice, which includes of Bawtry, Austerfield, Misson, Everton and Mattersey

I believe there is nothing better that anyone can do with their life than become a follower of Jesus Christ – it is life-changing and of eternal importance

God's mission is entrusted by Christ to His Church "to proclaim God's Kingdom, to heal the sick, exercise power over evil, and to make disciples of all nations."

Archbishop of York's Mandate

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This leads naturally to the second conviction. It sounds rather obvious, but this outlook on our evangelistic task is not always as clear as it should be to the church.

I believe there is no way to evangelise our nation than apart from the daily lives of ordinary Christians

“To ensure that all those in ministry, lay and ordained, are equipped, and provided with the necessary care and support, to undertake the mission and ministry required of them.”

Archbishop of York’s Mandate

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I believe Lesslie Newbigin provides an inspiring theological framework for why we must never underestimate the potential impact of every Christian in their daily lives.

The church *“must equip its members for active and informed participation in the public life of society in such a way that the Christian faith shapes that participation.”* For Newbigin the mission of individual believers in the world of culture is the primary place where the church’s missionary engagement takes place.



“I do not believe that the role of the Church in a secular society is primarily exercised in the corporate action of the churches as organized bodies in the political or cultural fields. . . . On the contrary, I believe that it is through the action of Christian lay people, playing their roles as citizens, workers, managers, legislators . . .”

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This does not mean neglecting the opportunities for the church to speak with a collective voice into some of the most pressing issues facing our world today. However, our commitment to growing disciples should mean seeking to equip every follower of Christ to see their day by day lives as the primary focus of their mission.



Bishop Paul Williams addressing the crowd at the refugee vigil held in Nottingham city centre

This is why I have been thrilled to meet people in their work place and in different parts of the community. I have asked the same question: how does your faith shape the way you approach your work? The answers have inspired me to believe we can go on greatly increasing our influence in society, shaping culture and values. It is also the prime setting in which we can more confidently communicate the reason for the hope we have in Christ.



Bishop Paul Williams met people in their workplaces during his tour of the diocese in the run-up to his inauguration. Below: New priests, women Bishops The Rt Revd Ruth Worsley and the Rt Revd Anne Hollinghurst, Revd Hannah Hall, and the latest readers to be licensed

Being thankful for the witness in people's daily lives includes all those who exercise authorised ministries in the church, both lay and ordained. They too have a daily life which is an integral part of their ministry as 'an example to the flock.'



This third conviction is rooted in the understanding that prayer is not a preparation for the greater work, it is the greater work. To be drawn into an ever deepening friendship with God transforms everything.

Which is why my 'daily life' begins in this new space set aside for prayer within Bishop's Manor. It still bears the markings on the wall as a reminder that it once contained the main staircase of the house. Jacob's vision of stairs reaching into heaven, with angel's ascending and descending, is an inspiring picture of how prayer draws us into God's action in the world, rather than the other way round.

I believe the church's mission is sustained and renewed in constant conversation with Jesus whose promise 'I am with you always' makes all the difference

"To build on the appetite in the diocese to revitalise prayer, enriching liturgy and deepening spirituality"
Archbishop of York's Mandate

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With the clarity of the Archbishop's Mandate and these core convictions in mind how do we move forward in the ministry of the gospel entrusted to us? Through this next season in the life of the diocese it is my intention that we increase our focus on 'growing disciples' – wider, young and deeper.

This is not to neglect our other priorities in Living Worship and Seeking Justice. It is just that I believe growing disciples with a compelling vision of the Kingdom of God will result in a greater commitment to justice and while-life worship too.

'Wider' in that we will seek to grow disciples in every part of the diocese, with no retreat from any community: urban centre, outer estates, rural villages or market towns.

'Younger' in that we will seek fresh ways to harness the boldness and creativity of children, students and young people across the diocese, not least in Nottingham which is the fourth youngest city outside London (average age 34.8).

'Deeper' as we grow in knowing Christ, so that as his disciples we can be an increasing blessing to the people among whom we live and serve in the workplace, family and community.

I want to lead a diocese that expects to grow and plans to grow. Yet where we acknowledge that beyond the energies of our planting and watering, God is the one who brings the growth. And so the glory goes to Him alone!

Over the next 6 months I am inviting us to look beyond 2020 at what kind of church we would like to be in 2025 or 30, with a refreshed commitment to care for every soul in the diocese. To imagine the future we hope for, then together to align our energies and resources to create fresh momentum for growing wider, younger and deeper.

For this reason over the next months I will be working with the Bishop's Senior Staff and Deanery Teams to conduct a 'Mid-way Review' of the 2020 Deployment Plan. To look again at those plans in light of changing opportunities and increased focus on growing disciples. I am told that it was always the intention that the plans would need to be reviewed rather than treated as something permanently set.

What next... strategic focus on Growing Disciples

Wider – Younger – Deeper

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Looking beyond 2020...22...25...30

- First stage conversations with Bishop's Senior Staff
- 'Mid-way Review' 2020 Deployment Plan with Deanery Leadership Teams Jan-Mar
- Consider vision for growth at Bishop's Council Residential 22-23 Jan
- Diocesan Synod on Vision for Growth 23 April
- Deanery Days of Prayer Lent
- Diocesan Week of Prayer 20-26 June

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Where will this take us in the coming months and years? I cannot be sure. All I know is that I am committed to enjoying myself rather than simply exhausting myself. It is my hope that this will be equally true for you too. Whatever challenges or uncertainties we face, personally or in the world around us, let us find our joy in the Lord who is the strength of his church.

Within our diocese we have one of the nation's most iconic trees. Major Oak was voted European Tree of the Year in

2015. As we look to God as the source of our joy and growth, I pray that we will participate together in the fulfilment of Isaiah's vision so that beyond 2020 in every community across this diocese there will be many 'oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.' (Isa 61:3)

