

THE BISHOP OF ST ALBANS' PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
DIOCESAN SYNOD
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It has been an extraordinary year. In February President Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine and since then we have all felt the impact of the war, most notably in the massive rises in energy bills across the globe.

All around the world we've seen the effects of climate change. Here in Europe we've had the hottest summer since records began, whilst there have been devastating floods in Pakistan, South Africa and Thailand. The adverse climate, and in some cases war, has also led to a terrible famine stretching across the Horn of Africa, which threatens to be as bad as the famines in the 1980s.

The death of Her Majesty the Queen

On the domestic front we have a new Prime Minister. Within days this was followed by the death of Her Majesty the Queen. There was an extraordinary outpouring of grief which affected every stratum of society.

I want to thank you all for the wonderful and rapid response to the news of the Queen's death. Within hours most of our churches were open, with notices outside welcoming people in to pray, to sign books of condolence and light candles. This was followed by the Proclamations of the new King in town centres across the diocese and then days later by memorial services in churches. A number of churches broadcasted the funeral live and were surprised and grateful for the significant number of people who came to church to share in this time of national grief and thanksgiving. All this took a great deal of agility and hard work and I am grateful for the way you and your colleagues responded.

It is, I think, important to note the extraordinary Christian witness of her Majesty the Queen. As always, she was very understated yet crystal clear about her personal faith:

I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish and sacrificial life. Countless millions of people around the world continue to celebrate his birthday at Christmas, inspired by his teaching. He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving; more in serving than in being served. We can surely be grateful that, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, so many of us are able to draw inspiration from his life and message, and to find in him a source of strength and courage.

In these and other similar words year by year in her Christmas messages, the Queen reminded us of the power of testimony. All of us, whatever our background and training, have the ability to speak of our personal knowledge of God and how our faith has encouraged us in good times and comforted in times of sorrow.

Our thoughts now turn to the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III on Saturday 6th May. We need to build on the goodwill of the people and capitalise upon the personal contacts we made during the events which marked the Queen's death and to offer a welcome to the wider community. We will be sending out some material about the coronation soon, but meanwhile may I encourage you to make plans with your PCCs.

Lambeth Conference 2022

In late July and early August we welcomed over 1000 bishops and spouses to Canterbury for the Lambeth Conference, entitled 'God's Church for God's World', as we worshipped and studied Peter's first letter together. It was wonderful for Bishop Richard and me to meet people from all parts of the Anglican Communion, from different cultures and languages. The main sessions were translated into a wide diversity of languages including French, Portuguese, Juba-Arabic, Burmese, Spanish, Korean, Japanese and Swahili.

It was humbling to meet bishops whose dioceses were affected by civil war or deadly diseases such as Ebola, which kills the majority of those who catch it. One bishop who was himself a refugee, having been driven out of his country and his diocese, was spending his time travelling around refugee camps ministering to the dispersed peoples of his diocese. Another bishop told me that it took a week to travel to the far end of his diocese using a light aeroplane, a motorbike and a canoe. It may me vow never to moan when I am next delayed on the M1 for fifteen minutes.

An integral part of the conference was the 'Lambeth Calls' which were a series of declarations proposing how we might respond to a wide range of issues affecting the world today. These included Mission and Evangelism, Safe Church, Reconciliation, Anglican Identity, Environment, Human Dignity, Christian Unity, Discipleship, Inter-Faith Relations, and Science and Faith.

What is sad is that the media in this country only really reported on one aspect of just one of the calls, that which dealt with human sexuality. There was no mention of the other parts of this 'call' which had a great deal to say about world poverty, racism, slavery, war, colonialism and inequality.

I hope that if you have not already done so you will read the Archbishop of Canterbury's introductory comments to the call on Human Dignity ([Lambeth Call on Human Dignity: Read Archbishop Justin's remarks | The Archbishop of Canterbury](#)) which refers to the issues of sexuality, rather than rely on media reports.

The Archbishop was not able to resolve the deep differences within the Anglican Communion any more than we can resolve them quickly and neatly in the Church of England but instead pointed out that this is not the first time that the church has lived with deeply conflicted views. He suggested that the Christian approach is to 'remain committed to listening and walking together to the maximum possible degree, despite our deep disagreement on these issues.'

We, of course, will be revisiting this subject as the *Living in Love and Faith* consultations are brought back to General Synod next year and as we will debate them in this diocesan synod. In the meantime I want to underline that as a diocese we are determined to be welcoming to all people regardless of their race, gender, class or sexuality.

The energy crisis

I want to return to the topic of energy supply which comes at a time when we as a diocese are working towards becoming Net Carbon Zero by 2030. The first and obvious thing to say is that the more we can do to insulate our churches, halls and vicarages the better, as well as exploring sources of renewable energy.

The government is putting in place a price cap on gas prices so that the average household will not pay more than £2500 annually for gas for the next

two years. Whilst there is a unit price cap for businesses and charities for the next six months, standing charges will continue to rise for many churches.

In addition, the government has also promised each household a grant of £400, paid in 6 monthly instalments from this month. I have already spoken about this grant in my recent video, saying that many people will be relying on this to pay their energy bills. However, some of us may be in the fortunate position to be able to manage without the grant and I've suggested if that's the case then, like me, you may be willing to donate it to your church, a charity, or to the special fund we've sent up in the diocese ([Energy Crisis Resources - Diocese of St Albans \(anglican.org\)](#) which will make grants to those churches who wish to run warm hubs this winter. Just as we opened our doors to the local community at the time of the Queen's death, so it may be possible in some parishes to work with the local council or charities and ensure that every community has a warm space for those who cannot afford to keep their heating on every day. May I encourage you to see if your church is able to be part of the 'Warm Welcome' initiative ([Warm Welcome | Equipping thousands of warm spaces across the UK](#)) run by churches in this country? Please remember that you can apply for a grant of £250 for warm welcome hubs by emailing fxprojects@stalbans.anglican.org.

There is no doubt that many of our churches are facing a major financial challenge this winter and if this is the case for your church please keep closely in touch with the archdeacon.

All of this raises difficult decisions for us today. As you will see in the budget presentation, we are asking for an increase in the parish share (which is less than the rate of inflation) and we are proposing to release money which comes from our new investment strategy for Net Zero Carbon work and mission initiatives. We realise that it is a difficult and sensitive balance to both ask for increased contributions from parishes and to be investing for the future of our buildings and our people. Of course, we will only be able to do this if we are able to collect the slightly higher levels of parish share as in previous years.

Safeguarding: Past Cases Review 2

You will have seen in the media that a major aspect of the Church of England's safeguarding work has been completed with the publication of the Past Cases Review 2. The diocese has been an integral part of this exercise which has examined our records and ensured that all past safeguarding concerns have been addressed and that victims have been offered support (You can read about it at [Past Cases Review 2 - Diocese of St Albans % \(anglican.org\)](#)). I would

like to thank everyone who has worked so hard on the review and to underline that we are still learning about this sensitive and painful subject. I am determined that we do all in our power to make every one of our churches and chaplaincies as safe as possible for all people

Confident in God's future

Finally, having burdened you with the war in Ukraine, the famine in Africa, climate change, the energy crisis and safeguarding, I want to remind you of the words of St Paul. You will remember that the early chapters of Romans recount the wonderful saving acts of God who sends his Son into the world to defeat sin and death and to overcome evil. He reminds us that nothing in all creation is able to separate us from God's love. In response, Paul tells us:

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality (Romans 12.11-13)

The test of our faith is not when we do this in good times, but when things are bleak or challenging. St Paul reminds us to focus all that we are on God's promises and to live for him in the world here and now. It's why we need to pray for each other and support one another in practical ways. In the words of our *Living God's Love* prayer:

*Stir us, strengthen us,
teach and inspire us
to live your love with generosity and joy,
imagination and courage;
for the sake of your world
and in the name of Jesus. Amen*