

Opening Address – Diocesan Synod, Saturday 13 June 2026

‘Encouragement to Live God’s Love’

Warm greetings everyone, literally today, to you all from your Cathedral.

As we gather today, we do so at a time when our world seems day by day increasingly fractured and divided. To read the news or to look around us we see conflict, suspicion, dishonesty, anger and fear. We see violence in so many places and forms: on battlefields, in cities and communities, online, and in relationships. We see people actively encouraged to distrust those who are different from them. We hear public discourse fuelled by a position of outrage rather than seeking to understand. And we see the outcome of algorithms, leaders, or those we cannot see but are in the shadows at work who exploit and profit from fear and hatred.

Across the world, and often close to home, there is a growing temptation to see others not as fellow human beings, equally made in the image of God, but as opponents. And the forces that pull people apart often seem stronger than those that bring people together.

Sometimes, those forces can feel evident within the Church as well.

As we gather today, we do so praying for God’s world, beautiful yet broken, and we pray for our Church reminded that we are the body of Christ and that like the early church called together in all our diversity, we are called today and every day to *encourage* the world to a different way – to *the way of love* – which can be seen in who we are and in what we say and do.

Last Wednesday was the Feast Day of St Barnabas, the apostle called the son of encouragement – who encouraged God’s people to live into their vocation, and to call others to do the same so that they would call the world to that different way, the way of love. Barnabas, one of those in the early church who sold what he had, putting it into the common purse so that all would have what they needed, in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles from his Feast Day we hear of his faithful witness to the Gospel and his encouragement to the early Church to do the same, even going to get Saul to join this witness, the result of which Luke tells us was people in Antioch coming to faith, which Luke also reminds us is the first place the followers of the way were called Christians.

In John 15, the Gospel for St Barnabas Day, we hear the source of Barnabas’ encouragement. ‘This is my commandment’, Jesus says to his disciples, ‘that you love one another as I have loved you’, ‘go and bear fruit, fruit that will last’. ‘I am giving you these commandments so that you may love one another’.

On the foundation of that love, Barnabas encouraged those first called Christians, who were together and had everything in common, to call everyone they encountered to live into their vocations and to demonstrate that way for the world, being themselves encouraging, generous, courageous, loving and fruitful for a world broken and divided.

As we gather in this synod in the context of the world which we live and serve, and the church in and through which we minister, this is a word in season for us and, as we gather for this synod, to look around this zoom room in the good company of one another, recognising each other's vocations, representing the ministries of parishes, chaplaincies, schools, and our Cathedral to see so much to be encouraged by. Even a snapshot of this week that has been, from a fantastic rural ministry conference this time last week, to a meaningful and united Diocesan Interfaith gathering on Wednesday evening, the ministries in our schools across the diocese, parish ministry of welcome, witness and care that has day by day in this week that has been encountered and supported people of all ages and life experiences, the ministries of our Bishops and Archdeacons, our diocesan staff team, rural deans and lay chairs, diocesan committees that have met, clergy, readers, church wardens, PCC members and volunteers who have worked so hard, maybe you like I attended a great Deanery Synod this week, and in the welcome offered to thousands of people to your Cathedral in so many ways – and perhaps most of all in this week that has been the confirmation of election of Bishop Andrew, now officially the Bishop of St Albans, we have so very much in the Diocese of St Albans to be encouraged by.

Encouragement to live into our gifts, and calling others to do the same, as in the ministry of St Barnabas, and in Jesus's prayer for his disciples, is necessarily defined and accomplished by love – love among us, love uniting us and calling us to loving service for the world.

And we know, Jesus backed up this encouragement to his disciples by praying for it too (John 17), which was not a call to uniformity. We know that they were far from that. As diverse as Jesus's disciples and the early church were, Jesus did not pray that his followers would be all the same, or indeed never disagree. Rather, he prayed that they would know how to engage amidst their differences and that they would remain united in him.

And he gives a reason for that unity, "... so that the world may believe."

Our unity is at the heart of our witness to the world, for there love is seen. In a culture marked by division, the Church is called to demonstrate another way of being. We are called to show that people can disagree without becoming enemies or indeed walking away from one another. And we are called to be marked by encouragement, of one another in our common life, of others around us and to the world - that God's love is for all creation.

That calling is particularly important as we gather today to conduct the business of this Synod.

They are matters that touch the lives of people across our diocese, the Anglican Communion and the world. They affect victims and survivors and those who seek safety and how we ensure a safer church. They affect congregations seeking renewal and growth. They affect clergy and lay leaders carrying responsibility in challenging times. They affect our stewardship of the resources entrusted to us. They affect our capacity and opportunities to serve the communities God has called us to love, and the questions and concerns that members will bring before us.

The decisions we make matter and how we make them matters too.

The manner in which we pray, listen, speak, question, challenge, disagree and discern is itself a form of witness. If we hear the call to encourage each other into our vocations and to live love, if we heed Jesus' call to unity that defines not only who we are but also how we are.

The communities we serve are longing for signs of hope. People are weary of conflict and polarisation and are searching for places where people can belong, be heard, and be valued. We certainly know that at the Cathedral – people of all ages and beliefs. Our parishes, chaplaincies, schools, and ministries are called to embody that hope. Today, in this Synod, we have an opportunity again to model it ourselves.

As well as in the life and witness of Barnabas, in our patron saint Alban, and in the priest Amphibalus, whose feast days we celebrate next week, we see that encouragement to live into vocation, have faith, faith that spans difference, which inspired them, courageously, to live love, even to death.

So as we begin our work together today, let us remember Barnabas whose encouragement calls each of us to live into our vocation and encourage others to do the same, calls our Church to be united in God's love, and with courage and hope live God's love for the world that the world may believe. Amen.

The Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore
Dean of St Albans