



Archbishop calls for reimagination of Britain

In the Presidential speech at the February General Synod, the Archbishop of Canterbury has argued that the current political and social climate is an opportunity for re-imagining the nation's practices, values, aspirations and global role. The Archbishop said "this could be a time of liberation, of seizing and defining the future, or it could be one in which the present problems seize our national future and define us."

The Archbishop went on to argue that the Church of England can be a part of the answer: "we have a voice and a contribution and a capacity and a reach and above all a Lord who is faithful when we fail and faithful when we flourish.

"We have the skills, the strength, the heritage, most of all the Christ sent vocation, what are we going to do as Britain is reimagined? How are we going to contribute to the national future?"

"There is before the churches of this land, over the next many years, an extraordinary opportunity to be part of reimagining a new Britain, its practices, values, aspirations and global role. To do so we must ourselves be cross shaped, Jesus following, confident in faith and humble in service, above all outward looking."

The Archbishop went on to draw on the narrative of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness in Luke 4:1-2 to warn against the temptation to self-indulgence, power, and grand gestures. Instead the Archbishop argued: "We are called to be the people of the cross ... seeing and loving the world around as Christ does, so that in this time of a choice between national hope and opportunity or threat and fear we may play the part to which we are called in reimagining our country and seizing the best future that lies before us."

You can read the Archbishop's full speech here: <http://bit.ly/reimaginebritain>

Culture change for seven days a week faith welcomed by General Synod

The Church of England is to undergo a major “culture shift” to mobilise lay members to spread the gospel in their everyday lives. General Synod has given its support to the report, “Setting God’s People Free”, which calls for Christians to be equipped to live out their faith in every sphere - from the factory or office, to the gym or shop - to help increase numbers of Christians and their influence in all areas of life.

The paper is a key element of Renewal and Reform, an initiative from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, to help grow the Church. It asks a key question of how to empower around 1 million Christians who are not ordained to live out their faith in all aspects of life Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday.

Introducing the report, Canon Mark Russell, CEO of Church Army, said: “We want to help Christians be even better influencers for the gospel in their everyday lives. We see this report as marking the start of a vital journey.”

Setting God’s People Free calls for a shift in culture, looks beyond the institutional Church, seeks to affirm and enable the complementary roles of clergy and of lay people, and proposes steps to nourish, illuminate and connect what is working already in parishes.

Calling on the Church to be more

confident of the difference it makes to the good of the nation, Canon Russell said: “There are a million people out there, in every village, every town and every city. People working in every profession, young and old, in rural areas and inner cities, and they give over 23 million hours of voluntary service.”

The report follows research that shows lay people lack confidence in applying their faith into their Monday to Saturday lives. An implementation plan will be rolled out to introduce new “learning communities” in pilot dioceses. A bid will be made this year for financial support from the Church Commissioners which through the Archbishops’ Council which is resourcing key elements of Renewal and Reform. This will be used to resource the changes called for in the report.

The debate heard from a wide range of speakers from Newcastle to Winchester, Essex to Bath and Wells and included people working in diverse contexts from the Armed Forces to the NHS as well as parish priests, Archdeacons, Bishops and the Archbishop of York.

For more information and access to the full report: <http://bit.ly/layculture>

House of Bishops’ Report on sexuality

The General Synod has voted not to “take note” of a Report by the House of Bishops following a debate on the report earlier on Marriage and Same Sex Relationships.

A take note debate is a neutral motion which allows Synod to discuss

the content and recommendations contained in a report without committing the Synod to the formal acceptance of any matter.

Responding to the vote, the Rt Revd Graham James, the Bishop of Norwich said: “I can guarantee that the House of

Bishops will consider carefully and prayerfully all the contributions made in the debate today...We have listened to those who have spoken, and those others who have made contributions to us directly. Our ongoing discussions will be informed by what members of Synod and the wider church have said as a result of this report."

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have written setting out the way forward for the next few months. Setting the tone, the Archbishops write: "How we deal with the real and profound disagreement - put so passionately and so clearly by many at the debate - is the challenge we face as people who all belong to Christ. To deal with that disagreement and to find ways forward, we need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church ... The way forward needs to be about love, joy and celebration

of our common humanity; of our creation in the image of God, of our belonging to Christ - all of us, without exception, without exclusion."

The Archbishops have set out a number of initiatives: for every Diocesan Bishop to meet with their General Synod members to gauge their desires for the way forward; for a new Pastoral Oversight group led by the Bishop of Newcastle to discern the development of pastoral practices; for a new teaching document from the House of Bishops around the subject of human sexuality. They will also be suggesting a debate at Synod in general terms on the topics of marriage and human sexuality.

For more information on the vote: <http://bit.ly/reportvote>

You can read the Archbishops' letter here: <http://bit.ly/archbishopsletter>

Fixed Odds Betting Terminals: Synod calls on Government to lower maximum stake

Synod called on the Government to reduce the maximum stake on Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) to £2 in a debate where members heard of the "huge suffering" caused by the machines.

Members unanimously backed calls for the Government as a 'matter of urgency' to bring forward proposals to lower the maximum stake on FOBTs for a single game from £100 to £2, in an amended motion brought by London Diocesan

Synod.

The motion spoke of 'widespread public concern' over the large amounts being wagered on FOBTs in high street betting shops and the 'destructive' impact of the machines on the lives of families and whole communities.

Members also called on the Government to bring forward proposals to amend existing legislation to grant local authorities the power to make provision about

the number and location of FOBTs in order to reduce the risk of harm to vulnerable people.

London Diocese member Clive Scowen, introducing the motion at the General Synod, said there was evidence that the ability to lose £100 'a spin' ruins lives - and that the presence of FOBTs on the high street was contributing to a 'spiral' of poverty in some of the poorest areas of the country.

The Bishop of St Albans, the Rt Revd

Alan Smith, welcomed a Government review already under way into the maximum stakes for FOBTs.

Of FOBTs, he said: "They pose a very serious danger to people living at risk of gambling related harm. Not only do they take advantage of those struggling with gambling addiction but they take huge amounts of money from the pockets of some very vulnerable people."

For more information:

<http://bit.ly/lowerbetting>

General Synod hails reconciliation as Christians mark 500th anniversary of the Reformation

The General Synod has welcomed signs of "convergence" between churches on key doctrinal differences which divided Christians for centuries in the wake of the Reformation.

Members of the Synod, meeting in London, backed a motion supporting further reconciliation between Roman Catholic and reformed churches as Christians around the world commemorate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation and celebrating the "rich spiritual blessings" the Reformation brought to the Church of England.

Moving the motion, the Bishop of Coventry, the Rt Revd Christopher Cocksworth, Chair of the Faith and Order Commission, said: "The 500th anniversary of the Reformation, which began with Luther's courageous insistence that salvation is not for sale, invites every Christian to join with the

whole church to be renewed in the grace of God and share the astounding news of God reaching out to the world, running to meet us in Christ and embracing us into his life by the Spirit with an infinity of love that lifts us into the full stature of our humanity and raises us into the joyful responsibility of being human."

He went on to say that the Church of England "has a particular responsibility for ensuring that the commemoration of the Reformation Anniversary this year can be an occasion of healing and for growth in unity between the churches in this country."

In a joint statement earlier this year, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, spoke of the need to "repent of our part in perpetuating divisions".

For more information:

<http://bit.ly/500reformation>