

## **Presidential Address June 2025 Diocesan Synod**

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here. You will have heard apologies from Bishop Karen who is recovering well from her recent operation and Archdeacon Penny who is in Portland prison – today. On Sunday we said farewell to Archdeacon Antony as he retires and moves to somewhere called County Durham, and tomorrow week, we say farewell to Archdeacon Alan in the Eucharist for St Thomas's Day in the cathedral at 5.30pm. As you know, Alan has led for the diocese in our ministry with the military and I am particularly delighted that he has recently been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, making him the highest-ranking army cadet chaplain in the country. Alan, we thank you and wish you and Anita God-speed.

This evening we welcome Alan Smith, First Estates Commissioner. Alan is a Canon of Salisbury and my immediate colleague in leading the Church Commissioners. Alan will help us learn about the work of the Commissioners as there is often misunderstanding about their work which is accountable to parliament. I know you will welcome Alan and value his commitment to come to Synod this evening, something which doesn't often happen.

The other important thing for your prayers is that the ordination retreat has now started and on Saturday 11 priests will be ordained and on Sunday 8 deacons will be ordained. This is a cause for much celebration. And this is in a context when vocations are down nationally, and the Church of England has only two thirds of the ordinands it needs each year to provide clergy for parish ministry. Even in this part of God's acre, it is becoming more difficult to recruit and fill posts. This is a challenge for our times and will get worse post-Covid before it gets better. At Pentecost we launched a vocations campaign. Please pray earnestly for more vocations to ordained and licensed lay ministry.

My day off, usually, is a Friday. I therefore always dread opening the inbox on a Saturday morning to see what nasties are waiting for me there. Last week, there was an email with the title Message from Jesus! Now that sounds good I thought, direct from our Lord with missional messages now available to arrive direct to one's inbox. Of course on opening this penny from heaven, it turned out as many emails do, to be from someone who has a very individual worldview and every prejudice under the sun. It's easy to see everything that is wrong with the world as everybody else's fault and then to claim that Jesus agrees. Sadly such emails are not uncommon. But this evening I have a new message which most certainly is from Jesus and frankly,

even though we're not very good at knowing how to deal with this, it really is good news.

As you will remember and as we have affirmed, the vision of Jesus of the Kingdom is set out in the Beatitudes and his strategy is articulated so powerfully in Luke 4, the Nazarene manifesto which he gave in his local synagogue.

It is just over two years since we launched our diocesan vision, ***'Making Jesus Known in every place, so that all may flourish and grow, seeking His kingdom here and now.'*** Since then, I have been encouraged daily by stories and examples of how the local church across the diocese has been living out this vision. Thank you, for all you are doing to Make Jesus Known.

Alongside the daily mission and ministry of the local church, we have been working on an application to the national church to support and accelerate the implementation of our vision and strategy. Our application was designed to support our ambitions for growth and transformation, through investing in creative partnerships in local mission.

I am therefore, delighted to inform you that following the submission of our application we have been awarded a grant of £5.15 million to support our plans to invest in missionally healthy parishes through establishing a first phase of Mission Hubs.

Beginning with 13 places and communities located in market towns, rural areas, coastal, urban and suburban areas, these hubs are committed to working in partnership, sharing and empowering neighbouring churches to support and enable their mission, service and growth. Alongside the investment from the national church these 13 places are also committing their own resources and funds to develop these partnerships. The first phase of Mission Hubs represents half of our deaneries with the potential to reach three-quarters of the population of the diocese. Therefore, it is our hope, prayer and expectation that in time, the whole diocese will experience the positive impact of this investment, which will look different in each missional context and tradition.

As we establish the first 13 Mission Hubs, we will be working with other local leaders to develop our approach to a second application and phase of hubs of a similar quantum, thereby expanding the impact and reach of this initial investment everywhere.

Sitting alongside Mission Hubs, which are an example of creative partnerships in local mission, is our continued investment in developing courageous Christian leaders, our commitment to climate action and working for justice, and responding to the ongoing challenge to be a diocese that is financially sustainable; all of which is underpinned by our ongoing commitment to ensuring that our churches are safe places for all.

For nearly thirty years, the diocese has kept going only by declining and selling. Now it is time to receive help and invest our own resources for growth. We are going to invest our way out of this just as God invested in humanity, even if that was costly to him.

I want to thank all those who have worked so hard to make this award possible. In fact, I am advised that our team should be congratulated for moving the fastest and furthest of any diocese. You know who you are, and the parishes that will be hubs can take credit for this too – so thank you. The message from Jesus today really is good news. Let's make him known!