

## **Diocese of Leeds**

### **Thirty-second Diocesan Synod, Saturday 14 March 2026**

#### **Presidential Address**

Dear friends,

We are on our way with Jesus to the cross, and I've been struck in reading through John's Gospel this Lent with a book by Prof David Ford, how John's Gospel puts the cross at the heart of the community that Jesus is building. It is on the cross that Jesus calls his mother and the disciple who he loves to share a home and to become a new family. It is on the cross that Jesus "gives up his spirit" – which for John is more than just a way of saying that he died. It is as though this is John's Pentecost moment. The church is created at the foot of the cross with Jesus' spirit poured out.

It is relationships which are at the heart of the church. Our relationship with God in Christ; our relationships with one another and a transformed relationship with the world around us. Relationships forged in that moment when Jesus gives up his life for us and breathes his Holy Spirit upon us.

As I mentioned at our last Synod together in October, this diocese has reputation nationally as having strong relationships and high levels of trust.

I witnessed that at my first General Synod – at least the first I have attended as a member – last month in London. We will hear later this morning more about General Synod as Catherine Shelley speaks to Diana Tremayne's General Synod Report.

Team Leeds at General Synod is a formidable group of people, with a range of views and theological positions. And yet the mutual support when any one of the team was called on to speak – was lovely to see. And actually I was heartened at Synod to experience in general far better relationships than I'd been led to believe by reports in the press.

Nevertheless, it is important here to acknowledge the serious pain that has been experienced and continues to be experienced because of the House of Bishop's proposal about the Living in Love and Faith process that was carried by Synod but at considerable cost, especially but not only by people who identify as LGBTQIA+.

I have been working with LGBTQIA+ individuals and groups in our Diocese, with the other bishops of our diocese, and with the rest of Bishop's Staff, on a new chaplaincy to be available for LGBTQIA+ and same-sex attracted people. This will offer pastoral support especially to clergy and licensed lay people and also more widely, recognising the pain and the scars that many people carry. Having consulted on this matter, we will be interviewing shortly for the post of chaplain, a voluntary role.

Going back to General Synod, we have elections to General Synod this year. Can I encourage all of us to encourage our deanery synod reps, especially young people, to stand for General Synod? It is an important national forum. We had some impressive debates and our voice from this diocese needs to be heard.

We continue to build and deepen our relationships here within the Diocese.

Last week I was with Bishop Stephen Race, our Provincial Episcopal Visitor. We had called together a small group to talk through how we live out the Five Guiding Principles in our Diocese. What it means in practice to enable the highest possible degree of communion between parishes and clergy who joyfully embrace the ministry of women bishops or priests, and those who on theological grounds cannot do so. This was a meeting marked by honest listening and a commitment to mutual flourishing.

I've just come back from three days in Barnsley with our Bishop's Staff team, and although we got through a lot of business, what stands out for me of that time is the quality of the relationships. We've been chewing over difficult issues such as parish share, our deficit, clergy deployment, diocesan policies on married ordinands and curates and age limits for ordination training.

We are absolutely not always of one mind. But we are committed to one another, we bear one another up in prayer and we share a common calling to serve God's people in this great and glorious diocese.

As it was on the cross that Jesus brought his mother and his beloved disciple together and gave up his spirit on to them, it is in the face of what we find difficult and challenging that we often find Jesus most powerfully drawing us to one another and breathing his spirit on to us.

This demands work and it is not always easy. There are encouragements along the way. Today we will hear an update on progress with *Barnabas: Encouraging Confidence*. Over recent synods we have heard about signs of hope and growth in our churches and the resources that are being provided to help churches take the next step in mission. This is an ongoing journey, and alongside continuing delivery of the current areas of support we have also been developing over the last months a proposal for more far reaching support from the national church.

I am pleased to let you know, before anyone else, that this proposal has been accepted and we have been awarded up to £11m of further funding over the next 6 years. This will be fully announced on Monday, but I wanted to be able to share this good news directly with you. Jude will provide some high level detail in her presentation but I wanted to say how delighted I am that the national church have given us such a strong vote of confidence in our plans and in the direction we are travelling together.

This funding will help us build on what is already bearing fruit, enabling confident Christians to be part of growing churches that truly transform their communities.

We are deeply encouraged that the national church shares our confidence in this vision and in the people and parishes who are bringing it to life. This is not the end of seeking funding but it is an important milestone along the way.

Can I express here on behalf of us all our appreciation of Jude and her team, along with many others, for the huge amount of work that they have put into this proposal?

Please express your appreciation electronically!

This new money will help us to develop relationships across our Episcopal Areas, and we have been talking at Bishop's Staff about how we can be accountable for the wise

use of this money not just to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Board in London, but to one another, across our parishes and benefices, our deaneries and areas.

We will also be talking later this morning about Parish Share. Again, our challenge as I see it is fundamentally relational. It is the challenge to move beyond a transactional approach which looks at Parish Share as “us paying for our ministry costs plus or minus a bit that we haggle about” to a different approach in which we see Parish Share, as Archdeacon Paul Ayers reminds us, as “paying forward.” We have received freely God’s grace given to us through the costly ministry of other people, often from past generations, the call now on us is to “pay that forward”, investing graciously in others so that God’s work can grow there too.

As we pay parish share relationally in this spirit, we find ourselves invested in lives and ministries of those other parishes and benefices to whom we give, praying for them, asking them how they’re doing, grieving when they suffer and rejoicing when they grow.

It is of course as we love one another deeply and in costly ways, that God’s love is made real and tangible not only to us but to others through us. Bishop Arun will be leading us with friends from the Leeds Episcopal Area in thinking about Christian Nationalism and our witness to the justice and reconciliation that God calls us to in Christ Jesus.

You will have seen reports of the recent GAFCON gathering in Nigeria, and we will be praying for Bishop Malcolm and others who are planning to visit our Tanzanian link dioceses later this year. Part of their discussions will be around how we hold onto our deep relationships built over many years in the face of deep divisions within the Anglican Communion.

We are proud to host on our diocesan website a report of months and even years of work by Bishop Nick on *Reimagining Europe: A Christian Perspective* and the contribution that churches make to our common life.

And of course we meet in the shadow of war: as we remembered in our opening worship from Psalm 120: *I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.* That was powerful from Inner Bradford, and other places as well in our diocese where many Iranians worship Jesus with us.

Bishop Smitha has been reminding some of us of the phrase used for Lent in the Orthodox Churches: “bright sorrow”. So let us hold that bright sorrow in our relationships this morning at our synod, praying for peace, praying for one another and receiving Jesus’ spirit breathed out on us from the Cross.