



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL
TRANSFORMING CHURCH. TOGETHER.

Saturday, 20 June 2026

Bishop's Address

Diocesan Synod - St Michael's Stoke Gifford

Introduction

Sisters and brothers in Christ, it is a great joy to gather as Synod. Whenever we come together like this, representing parishes, chaplaincies, schools, ministries and communities, we are reminded of something profound: we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. We are part of the work of God.

That truth has been on my mind recently. In times of change, I especially need to set my eyes on Jesus and Scripture which always draw me beyond myself to God, who I see and experience constantly at work among us. That gives us indestructible hope.

I have found myself returning to the words of St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians:

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." 1 Cor. 3.6

Paul reminds us that the work of mission is always a shared endeavor. It's a team game. One person plants. Another waters. Someone else nurtures and tends. Others pray, encourage, teach, serve, and support. Each contribution is critical and yet ultimately, growth belongs to God.

Those words are a source of encouragement as they remind us that we are all in this together—with one another and with God and in and amongst the goodness of Transforming Church. Together.

How is this more than a platitude?

...that growth belongs to God. Three things that can '*bust the platitude*' and underpin the ministry and discipleship we all offer are:

1. The freedom of not being the Saviour

This addresses one of the great pressures in ministry and discipleship. Paul's words remind us that the church's future does not solely rest on our shoulders. We are called to faithfulness, obedience, courage, and hard work. We are not the ones who ultimately bring growth. God does.



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That truth can free us from anxiety, unhealthy comparison, and measuring our worth solely by outcomes. It allows us to serve generously, take risks, and persevere because the burden of being the saviour belongs to Jesus alone.

2. Investing in People, Trusting God for Fruit

This is where our Urban Missioners are a perfect example, they are:

“... people who live, work and serve in an urban community to build long-term relationships, providing social support whilst sharing the good news of the life transforming Gospel of Jesus. PREPARED (a training course) has been equipping people to live out their calling to urban mission, empowering them to be ‘ready to serve, ready to lead.’”

We’re also investing in administration hubs, school’s workers, young people’s leads, coaching of LLM’s and clergy...

Trusting God for growth is not about passivity. Paul planted. Apollos watered. Faithful investment matters. The experience of the Urban Missioners (and I hope all of you) demonstrates what can happen when we invest deeply in people, communities and local churches. Their work is showing that belief in the local church is justified, patient presence matters, and fruit often emerges where people have committed themselves to God’s mission over time. We do not control the harvest; we are called to cultivate the ground faithfully.

Mark who was commissioned as an Urban Missioner a couple of weeks says this to encourage you:

“Becoming an Urban Missioner is an honour - to serve God’s Kingdom in my role amongst the congregation and visitors of St Barnabas church.

To me it is very reassuring that God has guided me to this point where I can serve my community with servant-based leadership to the benefit of all. And in that journey, I will impart the power and word of God. And with that hope - unity, love and light will shine into Knowle West and beyond.”

3. High Expectation, Deep Gratitude

Confidence in God’s sovereignty inspires high expectations. Having served in this diocese since 2019, I have seen so much of God’s faithfulness.

That leads me to a high expectation of what God will continue to do among us and deep gratitude for all that is already happening across our churches and



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communities. Trust, expectation and gratitude become the marks of a church that knows growth belongs to God and therefore looks to the future with hope.

The mission of the Church has never depended upon one individual, one strategy, one programme, or one generation. It depends upon the faithfulness of God, who calls ordinary people into his extraordinary purposes.

As I travel around our diocese, I see countless examples of that faithfulness. I meet lay leaders, congregants, clergy who serve with remarkable dedication.

I see churchwardens, PCC members, volunteers, chaplains, youth leaders, school teams, and congregations who faithfully give themselves, unstintingly, to the work of the Gospel week by week.

Some are planting seeds. Some are watering. Some are reaping a harvest.

I suggest it's not always immediately clear which stage of the process we are part of...and yet...God is at work in all of it.

I see the harvest at Confirmation services - a young woman was baptised and confirmed - her life had been changed. Two younger girls were taken by their vicar around the church; they stood in front of the font - *'what does this mean to you'*...

...the vicar said a beautiful and natural evocation of faith poured out of them, they spoke of knowing God and how that was good. A *'walk-up'* young man from Swindon, with no previous church or God knowledge, who felt the need to go to church. This was another life changed and he told me he'd set up a pool table drop-in because so many of his generation are asking big questions. This is harvest!

This matters deeply because the local church remains at the heart of God's mission.

From time to time, we hear predictions about the decline of the church. Yet my experience across this diocese tells a different story.

Repeatedly, I see local churches serving their communities with extraordinary generosity. Churches opening their doors to the lonely and isolated. Congregations supporting families in need. Churches engaging with schools, community groups, food banks, and local organisations. I see faithful prayer being offered day after day. Evangelism helping people come to faith. I see disciples growing in maturity.



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I see hope.

David Hockney - one of the best painters of his generation - painted, in later life, Woldgate Woods in the Yorkshire Wolds and treated them as the living, dynamic subject of his art.

A critic (Will Gompertz)¹ made a disparaging comment to Hockney about these paintings. Hockney sent the critic to visit the very line of trees. At first the critic saw brown trees and brown fields.

He did what Hockney advised and kept looking. After 15 minutes or so, as the light began to change, he saw purple tinges in the bark, many shades of green, sunlight glistening in puddles...Hockney had taught him to keep looking so he could see the beauty.

I see indestructible hope

I suggest, that longer look, is what we need to see the growth God gives. The more you look the more you see. Looking like this reminds us that belief in the local church is right and Godly.

Investment in the local church is our priority. The national church recently awarded us £900,000 in transition funding via their Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) – so that we can keep supporting and investing at parish level with Transforming Church.Together. Thank you for all you're doing locally.

Inspired by that gift, I invite us all as individuals and as churches to increase our financial giving, so that we can cover the full cost of our wonderful clergy across our Diocese. Our giving is directly linked to the ministry of people in every community.

Hope in the local church is indestructible because God works through communities of Christian people gathered in their place.

Let's be real - every challenge has not been solved; not every church is flourishing in every way. Neither have we discovered a perfect mission strategy.

I have hope because I have seen what God is doing among us and know God is more solid and precious than optimism.

Over many years in our diocese, I have seen, again and again, God's faithfulness.

¹ BBC Radio 4 PM on the day after Hockney died.



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Let's look at some recent and beautiful fruit...

You are called

Alongside that confidence in God, I have always had confidence in you, God's people. One of the great privileges of episcopal ministry is the opportunity to encounter the breadth and richness of the Church.

We all experienced the moment a few weeks ago when the person nominated to be our next bishop couldn't come for family reasons. That was a moment of many thoughts and emotions.

I remain. I love my calling to be your bishop and shepherd. I am managing the workload with others and will make some adjustments to stay well in body, mind and spirit as the vacancy continues.

A life in the day of a bishop!

I wonder what you think I do most of my time? People sometimes imagine that bishops spend most of their time leading.

I certainly have responsibilities that come with this office. There are decisions to make, priorities to discern, and leadership to exercise.

The life-giving truth is that my ministry is continually enriched by the calling of God in others. Much of my ministry involves listening, learning, praying, receiving, encouraging and being encouraged.

A current example is meeting those to be ordained and/or licensed as LLM's...one-to-one meetings that allow me to see formation happening before my eyes. God calling a wide variety of people and stirring them up, surprising them in all they can do and be for God and the church.

We're in it together

Thank God that being a follower of Jesus is always done with other people. We belong to one another, need one another and learn from one another. Together we *'roll up our sleeves'* and get on with the mission of God.

That is why I want to say thank you today for your faithfulness, your service, your prayers and your generosity. And for your willingness to keep going, even when the road, like life, is difficult.



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As we look ahead, I believe we are called to hold together. God remains faithful to his promises. The God we worship is calling us onwards. We should expect God to continue surprising us. We should expect new opportunities for mission. We should expect lives to be transformed. We should expect the Holy Spirit to continue moving among us, because of God's power and grace.

As we continue our work as a Synod, let us remember the words of Paul. Some plant. Some water. God gives the growth.

The future of the Diocese of Bristol is safe in God's hands. Therefore, let's be active and confident.

As Paul says to the Philippians:

*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you
will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. 1.6*

Amen.