

Address by the Chairman-Elect

The Bishop of Pontefract as newly-elected Forward in Faith Chairman, invites us to work together to create a plan for the future



Nicola Sturgeon said at the SNP Conference yesterday, 'to become the leader of the party that I joined as a teenager is the biggest privilege of my life, it is an emotional moment, but one that I cherish and one that I relish.' That is very much how I feel as I stand before you this morning.

On Monday, Synod will promulge the Canon to permit women bishops, so our National Assembly today is a pivotal moment for us.

I was ordained in 1982, and as I look back I reflect just how much the Church of England has changed. For the whole of that time the ordination of women has been a part of our lives. In hindsight things could have been done differently or gone better. However, we can look back with some pride at what Forward in Faith has achieved – and what we have prevented. Our struggle began with trying to stop the inevitable, but more recently we have been trying to secure provision that will enable us to continue with integrity in our church. We have won that battle. We defeated the legislation of two years ago that would have destroyed us and have secured provision that is good enough as a basis for our future.

True Anglicans

But when we look back, we should also do so with penitence. Have we always lived up to Our Lord's teaching and example? Have we always loved our enemies and blessed those who persecuted us, turned the other cheek? Have we sometimes allowed the struggle to corrupt us, to make us less christlike?

We now have an invitation to flourish within the life and structures of the Church of England. Are we ready to respond to that invitation and that challenge? If we have sometimes been pushed to the margins – or even preferred to take refuge there – are we now ready to move back and take our rightful place in the centre? We are the true Anglicans. Our future is calling.

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Of course there is sorrow at what the Church of England has done. But we need to be known for love, not anger. Projecting an image of anger and bitterness will not attract people to the catholic faith we proclaim.

What we must do

We must continue to tell people why ordaining women to the priesthood and episcopate is wrong – if we don't, that will be forgotten, and our tradition will cease to exist – but we must be known also for what we affirm: catholic faith and order in general, the catholic doctrine of the sacraments – all the sacraments, not just the sacrament of Orders: Christian matrimony, reconciliation (with the seal of the confessional which is now under threat in Synod), and episcopal confirmation, to name but three.

We must not cease to teach our people, and any who will hear, about The Issue. But we must not decline into a single-issue campaign. The Society exists 'to promote catholic teaching and practice within the Church of England' – all of

it – and Forward in Faith must support and resource us all in that.

We must be wise as serpents as well as gentle as doves. We must be vigilant. We must watch out for the wiles of archdeacons. When I was appointed to be an archdeacon in Wakefield in 1997 one parish wrote to Nigel McCulloch asking for alternative archidiaconal oversight. Flying bishops is one thing, but flying archdeacons?

Wider engagement

We must also be open to, and engaged with, the rest of the Church of England. Young people who weren't born when the first women were ordained to the priesthood, and weren't brought up in the catholic tradition, are offering themselves for ordination in that tradition. But how will such people find their way in, if our doors are not open and our bridges to the rest of the Church are not intact? We need to develop some of these young men to be future bishops and archdeacons.

Part of our vocation is to be that part of the Church of England that is still listening to the wider Church beyond these shores, still listening to the Church across the ages, not completely captivated by the preoccupations of the here and now. We are the Church of England's ecumenical conscience, the guardians of the great tradition.

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A broad movement

Though we must not be a single-issue campaign, we must also not allow ourselves to be hijacked by the single-issue campaigns of others. We must remain a broad movement, one that is united in defence of catholic faith and order, and the catholic doctrine of the sacraments, not one that is divided by dissension within our ranks.

We must also be tolerant of the diversity of views that exists among us. There are Prayer Book Catholics, Anglo-Papalists and Evangelical Catholics, devotees of the cassock alb and of the amice, eastward facers and westward facers. (And after thirty-one years as a priest and nearly twelve years as a bishop, I still come across many other bizarre practices I have never experienced before.) There are Christian socialists and conservatives. And there are people who take a great variety of views about many great issues of today – social, political and ethical.

Differences

We must be clear about where the red lines are; we must never teach what the Church does not teach; but we must also accept that if we are a lively and diverse body of people we will never agree completely about everything. We must resist any who want to misuse Forward in Faith for their own ends, to hitch us to other campaigns – conservative or progressive – and any whose impact on our movement will tend to divide rather than unite. We must talk more to each other, with the single-minded purpose of ensuring we all sing the same words to the same tune, and try to spot potentially unhelpful interventions from within our respective memberships before

they surface in public. Differences need to be dealt with within the membership and not on the floor of debating chambers or in the press.

Unity among ourselves

We must work harder at unity among ourselves. Not just within Forward in Faith and The Society but across the Catholic Movement. Catholic Societies need to work together, not in silos. The societies have different roles:

- The Society – an ecclesial body
- Forward in Faith – supporting Society with administration and finance, campaigning, advising on resolutions and vacancies
- The Additional Curates Society – vocations, stipends and resources
- The Church Union – teaching and catechesis
- Devotional societies
- Priests' societies
- Groupings of Readers, Religious, and ordinands in training.

I believe we are stronger because of the inheritance of all these societies that we cherish, but we need them to work together.

If we are not to disappear into oblivion, as a movement that lost

its way, missed the opportunity it was given, we must all work *Together* (the name of our newspaper is the clue!) – not in separate empires. Now, today, this year!

Making it a reality

So my challenge to you and me today is to spend the next year working together on a plan for our future. I invite us all to participate in the discussions. Write to me, ring me, share your views and ideas. Volunteer to help. We can't leave this to one or two individuals. If we believe we can now flourish, we need to make it a reality.

Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

'The principle of reality, of a word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew, is essential to evangelization. It helps us to see that the Church's history is a history of salvation, to be mindful of those saints who inculturated the Gospel in the life of our peoples and to reap the fruits of the Church's rich bimillennial tradition, without pretending to come up with a system of thought detached from this treasury, as if we wanted to reinvent the Gospel. At the same time, this principle impels us to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which make that word fruitful. Not to put the word into practice, not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centeredness.'

The challenge is now to make the future a reality. Will you join me in that challenge – *Together*? **ND**