

GENERAL SYNOD

A vision and narrative for Renewal and Reform

Background

1. Renewal and Reform is a body of work which seeks to provide a narrative of hope to the Church of England in the 21st century. It builds on the 3 goals articulated and embraced by General Synod in 2010 to:
 - Contribute as the national church to the common good
 - Facilitate the growth of the church in numbers and depth of discipleship
 - Re-imagine the church's ministry

A plentiful harvest

2. Renewal and Reform is rooted in an understanding of Luke 10:2:

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

3. God has called us afresh in our generation to be salt and light, to love our neighbours as ourselves, to have compassion on a lost and bewildered generation. We live in a time of turmoil and nothing is to be gained by denying uncomfortable truths. But God is faithful and therefore ours is also a time of hope. Christ calls us to pray in hope that the Lord of the harvest will send labourers into his harvest field.
4. The Bible tells of the surprising work of God in calling the most unexpected people. As the church now seeks to nurture new generations of leaders we too will need to look in unexpected places. We may need to focus on the fringes where people are finding faith, meeting Jesus and committing themselves to the work of the Kingdom. And we will need to go beyond the fringes to reach out and listen carefully to those who have not even thought of Jesus, confident that as we plant and water seeds God will give the growth.
5. Renewal and Reform offers a message of hope through changed lives and transformed communities as people of faith and people finding faith also discover their vocation to love God and serve others. This loving service will find voice and expression in myriad ways but will be underpinned by justice, mercy and a humble walk with God.

A hopeful future

6. By building on, challenging and supplementing the excellent work that is already taking place across the parishes, dioceses and in the National Church Institutions it is hoped that Renewal and Reform will help enable the church to move to a place where:
 - Followers of Jesus are faithful witnesses to the transforming love of God in word and action
 - Churches are equipped to make and sustain disciples across all generations
 - Churches, chaplaincies and fresh expressions are able to have the ministry and leadership they need
 - Dioceses have senior leadership which is more representative and better equipped for God's mission
 - The whole church can confidently communicate our faith in a digital age
 - The whole church is focussing greater energy on our participation in God's mission
7. And through all of this that more and more people may come to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

A realistic assessment

8. As God is faithful there is nothing to fear. And so Renewal and Reform does not seek to duck the challenges and realities facing the church; we know they are serious and deep-rooted. They include:
 - A significant and continuing decline in and ageing of church attendance
 - A significant decline in the number of stipendiary clergy, which is due to accelerate in the next ten years
 - The unsustainability of certain patterns of ministry
 - The lack of capacity in at least some dioceses to envision, develop and implement strategies for a more hopeful future
 - The lack of leadership capacity in some places to respond effectively to current and future challenges
 - The legal and cultural constraints and the institutional inertias that impede necessary change

9. But we benefit from a common understanding that each of the above offers significant opportunities. Renewal and Reform will seek to enable and facilitate confident and hopeful engagement with these and other challenges, nurturing the good and re-imagining the unsustainable.

A growing church

10. One of the clear and intended outcomes of this work is to reverse the decline of the Church of England so that we become a growing church, in every region and for every generation; a church open to and for everyone in England, building up the Body of Christ and working for the common good; a confident Church, equipping new generations of leaders, ordained and lay, for ministry and mission; a serving church where all God's people live out their vocation to serve and to witness.
11. That is our aim. Renewal and Reform is not based on a prescription of what every church should be, nor does it represent a single Church of England strategy or describe the whole of the Church of England's work. We need prayerfully to build on our rich inheritance: the daily and weekly rhythms of prayer, worship and proclamation; the thousands of hours of spoken and unspoken service in and to the community; the touching of lives at profound points through weddings, funerals and baptisms and sector ministries; the place for the committed and the enquirer, for people of very loud and very quiet faith; the planned and the random encounters; the evangelistic voice, proclaiming the love of Jesus in and to this generation; the prophetic voice, the continued call for justice and mercy; the assumption – and reality – that the church is still there when nobody else is willing to help.
12. Renewal and Reform seeks humbly and prayerfully to build on this inheritance to:
 - Grow disciples in every place who are committed to conforming their own lives to the pattern of Christ and confident in sharing their faith with others and making Christ known
 - Call more clergy and lay leaders into a wider variety of ministries
 - Re-direct money to where it is most needed and makes the most difference
 - Foster a range of creative and imaginative mission projects which both strengthen our inheritance and open up new possibilities
 - Simplify rules and procedures to support and enable rather than inhibit
 - Give renewed voice and hope to the people of God and the communities they serve

A Lutheran Prayer for Courage

*Lord God,
you have called your servants
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

William Nye
Secretary General

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