

The Church of England is to undergo a major "culture shift" to mobilise lay members to spread the gospel in their everyday lives. General Synod has given its support to the report, "Setting God's People Free", which calls for Christians to be equipped to live out their faith in every sphere - from the factory or office, to the gym or shop - to help increase numbers of Christians and their influence in all areas of life.

The paper is a key element of Renewal and Reform, an initiative from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, to help grow the Church. It asks a key question of how to empower around 1 million Christians who are not ordained to live out their faith in all aspects of life Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday.

Introducing the report, Canon Mark Russell, CEO of Church Army, said: 'We want to help Christians be even better influencers for the gospel in their everyday lives. We see this report as marking the start of a vital journey.'

Setting God's People Free calls for a shift in culture, looks beyond the institutional Church, seeks to affirm and enable the complementary roles of clergy and of lay people, and proposes steps to nourish, illuminate and connect what is working already in parishes.

Calling on the Church to be more confident of the difference it makes to the good of the nation, Canon Russell said: 'There are a million people out there, in every village, every town and every city. People working in every profession, young and old, in rural areas and inner cities, and they give over 23 million hours of voluntary service.'

The report follows research that shows lay people lack confidence in applying their faith into their Monday to Saturday lives. An implementation plan will be rolled out to introduce new learning communities in pilot dioceses. A bid will be made this year for financial support from the Church Commissioners which through the Archbishops' Council which is resourcing key elements of Renewal and Reform. This will be used to resource the changes called for in the report.

The debate heard from a wide range of speakers from Newcastle to Winchester, Essex to Bath and Wells and included people working in diverse contexts from the Armed Forces to the NHS as well as parish priests, Archdeacons, Bishops and the Archbishop of York.

More information

Renewal & Reform is an ambitious programme of work, which seeks to provide a narrative of hope to the Church of England in the 21st century. It is rooted in a sense of Biblical hope and an understanding of Christ's call to us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into the harvest field. Renewal & Reform aims to build on the 3 goals 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

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The full report before General Synod

The motion passed was:

'That this Synod:

- a. *welcome the report from the Archbishops' Council, Setting God's People Free (GS 2056); and*
- b. *call on the Archbishops' Council to develop the implementation plan referred to in section 5 of the report and to work closely with the House of Bishops and the dioceses in taking it forward.'*

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