

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, has called the Church of England to “learn afresh how to share the gospel in the world” as church and society face “turbulent times” in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

In his first public address since his confirmation as Archbishop, he spoke of the pain and loss many have experienced in recent months and the major challenges ahead.

Speaking to members of the General Synod, who are meeting remotely today following the cancellation of the annual July group of sessions in York, Archbishop Stephen spoke about lockdown, as a time when people have experienced a “stripping back of our lives”, bringing hardship but also clarity and a renewed focus on God.

He also warned that the Church has allowed itself to become “tribal and divided” and now needs to “learn again how to love one another, love the world and love God”.

His comments came in a joint presidential address, alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. Members are also discussing the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and joining question and answer sessions on a range of issues.

Archbishop Stephen, who was until recently Bishop of Chelmsford, spoke of his experience of recent months of lockdown.

“Do not misunderstand me,” he said.

“I hugely miss our church buildings and our liturgy, just as I also miss going to the cinema and eating in restaurants, or just having a coffee; and I grieve for the fact that I was not able to say goodbye to the diocese of Chelmsford in the ways I wanted, nor am I able to hug my new grandson without donning a mask; and I cry out for the pain of all those socially distanced funerals, the thousands of people who have died alone, the baptisms, weddings and ordinations that have had to be postponed; the economic misery which is around the corner and the devastating impact of this pandemic upon the whole life of our world.

“But neither can I deny, that it has forced me to encounter things about myself which I had allowed to remain hidden behind the security of the things I have had to relinquish.”

He spoke about a group he is leading to discern a vision and strategy for the Church for the next decade.

The vision, he said, is the easy part: “It is unchanging - it is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and continues to do through the power of the spirit.”

He acknowledged that the Church will have to make decisions about priorities amid limited resources but he emphasised that it has reached no conclusions and hopes to bring some proposals to Synod next year.

“At the moment I am engaged in a very wide ranging discussion with people from all across the church but with a particular determination to

draw in and listen to the voices of younger Christians and those whose voices are not usually so easily heard in Church,” he added.

He concluded: “So, dear General Synod, as we enter some turbulent times and some challenging decisions, we are just going to have to learn again how to love one another, love the world and love God so that, both individually and collectively, we can be the place where God is revealed.

“We’ve not always been very good at this.

“We have allowed ourselves to become tribal and divided.

“We have allowed secondary things to obscure our belonging to each other.

“The Holy Spirit reveals Christ in us; and through us may we learn afresh how to share the gospel in the world.”

## Further information:

- Read the [full text of Archbishop Stephen's Presidential Address](#)
- Watch the [meeting of General Synod members live](#)
- Read [more about Archbishop Stephen Cottrell](#)
- Watch Archbishop Stephen's [Confirmation of Election as the 98<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of York](#)

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