

- Bishop Graham Tomlin to lead work to explore how the Church can explain and share with others its profound and transforming story in public.
- Project to be based at the Lambeth Palace site and run in partnership with prominent UK-based theological faculties.
- Output to include a magazine website, explaining aspects of Christian faith in accessible language and Christian perspectives on culture and contemporary life.
- It will offer a learning and training programme for senior Christian leaders and emerging communicators, and theological research into the task of Cultural Witness in the contemporary context.



The Bishop of Kensington, Dr Graham Tomlin, will step down in August 2022 to lead the new Centre for Cultural Witness, a project to underpin the Church's work of being a Christian presence in every community, by exploring how the Church can communicate and share with others its profound and transforming story in its public witness.

Rooted in the Anglican church but fully ecumenical and international, it will embrace a wide range of Christian voices to seek to share the rich wisdom that the Christian faith can offer contemporary societies.

Upon the Centre's formal launch in the summer, Bishop Graham will step down as Bishop of Kensington, having held the position since 2015.

A consultation to help guide the appointment to the Suffragan See of Kensington will be announced shortly.

The Centre for Cultural Witness will initially run as a four-year project and will, be based at the Lambeth Palace site. It will be funded by donations, including from the McDonald Agape Foundation and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Charitable Fund.

Bishop Graham will lead a full-time staff, supported by regular and occasional contributors. Recruitment for this team will begin shortly.

The project will focus on the following three key areas:

1. **Communication:** The main outward facing work of the project will be a "magazine" style website. This will focus not on internal church debates, but on explaining Christian faith in accessible terms and how it might contribute, challenge and respond to contemporary cultural issues and themes, in conversation with those of all faiths and none. The content of the website will be guided by an independent Editorial Board and will be committed to develop a range of both regular and occasional contributors, both well-known names and younger, more diverse voices.
2. **Learning:** The Centre will draw together prominent Christian leaders with media specialists and academic theologians, involving partnerships with prominent university theology faculties, to help develop the Church's voice in public. This will include developing and supporting a network of emerging younger communicators, giving both training and a platform for their contribution.
3. **Research:** The Centre will conduct dedicated theological research into the changing nature of culture and communication and how the church can better communicate its transformative message in the contemporary world.

Bishop Graham said: "We have a remarkable story in the Christian faith that has shaped cultures over centuries in profound ways.

"Yet we need to find better ways to communicate that faith so that others can understand and believe it today.

"My hope and prayer is that this new initiative can help re-tell that story in imaginative ways for new generations and enable the Church to find a clearer voice to share its wisdom with others."

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: "We are living in times and in a world that urgently need healing, justice and hope. In other words: a world that needs the gospel of Jesus Christ and the good news of his kingdom.

"Giving expression to that good news is the task of every new generation of Christians.

"That is why I am delighted to welcome the Centre for Cultural Witness and I'm especially pleased it will be led by Bishop Graham Tomlin, who will bring to it deep theological knowledge and a great flair for communication.

"I look forward to learning from the Centre and pray God would use this witness to excite, inspire and engage many with Jesus Christ, and the joy and wonder of his kingdom. This is timely, creative and essential."

The Bishop of Aston, Anne Hollinghurst, a member of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, said: "Our society faces multiple challenges for which it appears ill-equipped.

"The global pandemic has highlighted the divisions and inequalities in society. Issues of racial and climate justice demand urgent attention.

Digital communication and artificial intelligence are changing how we live. "

"At the same time there is disillusionment with political and economic systems and those who run them. There is a need to lift up the eyes of our nation to a new horizon of hope.

"That horizon is what the timeless good news of Jesus Christ reveals but we often struggle as the church in our contemporary culture to speak engagingly of the compelling beauty, sweep and relevance of this horizon.

"The new Centre for Cultural Witness has its sights boldly set on enabling us to tell afresh the Christian story on the public stage, confident that it holds the key to the transformation and new future that many long to see.

"It sets out no less than to capture the imagination of our generation and to restore a cultural vision for our times. I am thrilled that Bishop Graham Tomlin will be taking a lead in a project of such significance for church and society."

The Revd Dr Andrew Davison, Starbridge Lecturer in Theology and Natural Sciences in the Faculty of Divinity, and Fellow in Theology and Dean of Chapel at Corpus Christi College Cambridge, said: "This initiative is sorely needed.

"The theological tradition of the Church is one of its treasures, but it has become a hidden one. The Centre for Cultural Witness looks set to bring it to light.

"Theology has the widest possible range of interests: nothing less than 'God and everything'. The Centre will embody that breadth. The world of academic theology is particularly vibrant today, not least when it bridges between present contexts and profound resources from previous ages. The Centre will draw on that depth.

"This initiative is not about building defences; it is about exploring the central questions posed by human beings down the centuries in conversation with people of all faiths and none. Setting arid proofs and arguments aside, it wants to show that theology is the stuff of life and the Christian faith has wisdom to share with everyone."

The Bishop of Loughborough, the Rt Revd Saju Muthalaly, said: "I heartily welcome the vision and aims of the Centre for Cultural Witness (CCW).

"The person of Jesus Christ is God's most precious gift to the world, and the Church's call to be a community of witnesses to Christ's life, death and resurrection is not diminished in a pandemic world."

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"I believe the CCW's outward-looking focus and desire to creatively, prophetically and imaginatively reflect Christianity in our culture - and do it in such an intentional, international, transcultural and ecumenical manner - will be a tremendous blessing."

Notes to Editors

For more information and to request an interview with the Bishop of Kensington, please contact the Diocese of London Media Team on 02076189106 or dioceseoflondon@luther.co.uk.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/bishop-kensington-lead-new-centre-cultural-witness>