

GENERAL SYNOD HUSTINGS FOR LAITY QUESTION 1

What do you see as the single greatest challenge the Church must face over the next 5 years, and how would you seek to address it?

<p>BARRON, Mr Alastair</p>	<p>The greatest single challenge is to communicate God's love and Jesus's message in ways that are relevant, inclusive and impactful to people's lives. If we succeed in doing that, I believe that people will see and hear and the Church will grow in size and discipleship and it will succeed in its mission. As Christians, we know that we all heard before we believed and so this was the foundation of our faith. The challenge, though, is not just to send messages out as communications, although that is also important in these media dominated days. It is about how we live Christ's message practically in our home lives, our working lives and our relationships with others. My work colleagues know I am a Christian and even in this largely secular age, I hope that causes them to think and see my faith in a positive way – perhaps something they should know more about.</p> <p>I believe then that, at all levels but particularly at local levels where the church really can impact individual lives, we should encourage 'activism' – doing something that shows we live Christ's love for others, living by example, trusting in God but also doing something about it !</p>
<p>CLIFT, Dr Simon</p>	<p>To maintain our outward focus on mission, remaining faithful to our calling to "<i>proclaim the Gospel afresh in each new generation</i>", in the face of potent internal issues which threaten to derail us from this God-given mandate.</p> <p>This is no small task given the need for the Church to continue its conversation around human sexuality where strongly opposing views will be aired which threaten to tear us apart. This mission focus also needs to be sustained while the Church comes to terms with steadily dwindling clergy numbers with 40% expected to retire within the next 10 years.</p> <p>However those watching from the side lines waiting for the Church to either break up or shrivel up are not taking into account the faithfulness of God who remains totally committed to His Church and the dynamism of the Christian gospel which is "<i>the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes</i>".</p> <p>So to meet this challenge I give my full support to the current Diocesan strategy to ensure that every Parish has its own local mission plan.</p> <p>We must remain confident in our historic and biblical faith, but flexible & imaginative in our approach while seeking to maintain Christian unity.</p>

<p>COULTER, Mrs Alison</p>	<p>Growth! Attendance at services has halved in the past 40 years, and our congregations are ageing - the average age of church goers was 61 in 2011. If we don't grow, then the Church of England will fade away.</p> <p>The picture is not universally bleak, however, and there are areas of new life and growth: we know that Messy Church is very successful, as well as mid-week study events, for example Alpha and the Marriage Course, and these also tend to attract younger people. Cathedral congregations are also growing, and churches with a focus on serving the community, for example some Churches have set up coffee shops. We need to understand better what brings growth and then channel our resources to support these efforts. This will mean change - we need to have buildings that are fit for purpose, lay people empowered to lead and to serve, and more focus on serving our communities through the week, not just on Sundays.</p>
<p>DAVIES, Mr John</p>	<p>The single greatest challenge facing the church is the same it's always been. It never changes. It is the imperative to mission from our Lord (the Great Commission) which concludes each of the 4 gospels.</p> <p>Our primary task is to make disciples.</p> <p>The difficulty is that our social environment is constantly changing. We need to find new ways to 'proclaim afresh the Gospel to each generation'.</p> <p>The National Censuses of 2001 and 2011 show a decline in the non-church going Christians of 20%. This is horrendous! We've got to stop expecting people to come to us and to start going to them.</p> <p>New ways need to be found to witness our faith. All of us have a part to play in witnessing our faith through social outreach. There's work to be done in schools promoting National (Christian/Bible?) values in schools ('Open the Book'). There are communities to build on new developments. There's the homeless, there's food banks, debt counselling, parent and family support and now asylum seekers. Church isn't just about Sundays!</p>
<p>FRY, Mrs Christine</p>	<p>Britain is increasingly becoming a society that is turning its back on God. The majority of the population are indifference or disinterested in God and we have a new generation who do not have any biblical background. I consider mission to our society is the greatest challenge we face as a church currently.</p> <p>We need to be brave and speak out - share the good news of salvation with those around us. The message is the same, but the way we deliver it may be different:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to live out our lives according to God's principles and being ready and eager to explain our faith to those around us. • Seeking to make our churches friendly to outsiders' and especially to young people. (This may include the way we run our services - not just being friendly!) • Using guest events at a local church level to invite our friends to a meal and an explanation of some part of the gospel. • Extending the method used by university Christian Unions of inviting friends to read the bible one to one. (www.uccf.org.uk/uncover/). • Making more use of the internet and social media to make the gospel more accessible. (www.christianityexplored.org/)

<p>GREENE, Ms Jay</p>	<p>Professor Linda Woodhead’s research findings on Religion and Society make sobering reading: fewer than 10% of under 25 year olds identify as members of the Church of England. The demographics show what we know from the pews – in many places ours is an ageing church. The problem runs deep and will not necessarily be solved by making church services more accessible. From discussions with a wide range of people, in both work and social contexts, I believe a majority of people have little sense of need for God in their lives. They have not absorbed this sense through watching us. Nor do they see us as spiritually attractive. While our Church is perceived as misogynist and homophobic, detached from the everyday concerns of “real” people, we will never attract new people to join us.</p> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the public face of the church. • No more own goals – votes against women bishops and opposition to equal marriage live long in people’s memories. • More bold statements on social justice issues by bishops, like the very welcome statements about payday loans. We do care about “real” people but must be <u>seen</u> to care. • Be willing to change for others’ sake.
<p>HUNT, Mr Alan</p>	<p>As ever, the primary call and challenge for us as individuals and worshipping communities, and as the Church of England, is to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ in all his uniqueness, and to ‘live his mission’ in the power of the Spirit. While thinking about this question I had a very helpful reminder, from Colossians 1: 15-20, that Jesus is ‘the head of the body, the church’, and since he ‘will come to have first place in everything’, we should serve and witness to him accordingly. So I believe that the centrality of Jesus, as our head, should be our first consideration and our guiding principle, not only during the next five years but always. In that light, as we seek to affirm all that is right and good in church life, change what must be changed, and be faithful to Scripture in thought, word and action, we should (as someone has said) ‘let the main thing be the main thing’.</p>
<p>KIDD, Mr Christopher</p>	<p>Bishop Newbigin pleaded for a genuine missionary encounter between the gospel and our culture. This spawned a ‘Gospel and Culture’ movement which has profoundly influenced the UK Church leading to thriving Alpha courses, committed Street Pastors, busy food banks, debt counselling services and much more.</p> <p>We have a commitment to pioneering, leading to many new expressions such as Messy Church, Café Church and Pub Church. In the midst of all these encouragements I would suggest that the greatest challenge facing the UK church today is a lack of confidence in the gospel message that sits at the heart of all of that activity.</p> <p>The biggest challenge is the danger that action replaces conviction. Action without conviction is just social work – good in itself but not the whole gospel. And conviction without action is mere pontificating. Blend the two together and what we have is truly gospel. Truly ‘good news’.</p> <p>As a Church we need to help people to become more confident in continually seeking continually to better understand Jesus’ life, character and teaching as the centre of our biblical framework, and to prayerfully consider what the Holy Spirit is saying to us as individuals, and our wider community.</p>

LALLY, Mr Daniel	The church needs to manage it's decline by successfully engaging with the community. It also needs to use all media successfully and ensure all people have access to it and know it is there. The Church of England needs to stand firm on it's policies and to ensure the Christian witness does not become diminished and in doing so, it will need to challenge those authorities and educate them to ensure they know where we are coming from.
MAIN, Mr Paul	I would love to be able to put forward here something positive about our mission, but I cannot pretend the Church's greatest immediate challenge is anything other than the issues surrounding sexuality. This is a potentially divisive issue for the Church of England (and the Anglican Communion as we know it). While it would be premature to address this before the programme of Shared Conversations is complete, it needs to be addressed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. (See Q5.)
MOORE, Mrs Lucy	The challenge of how to inspire and equip <i>every</i> member of every church to live out their faith seven days out of seven in homes, communities, schools, colleges and workplaces. That's what authentic discipleship is about and that's what the Church is for: not to 'do Sunday services better' but to make a difference through presence, prayer, worship, words and actions and point others towards the God who can change things for the better. If we can turn the Church to face outwards, with Christ firmly at the centre, our gathered worship will be transformed too. How to do this? We need to get to grips with what discipleship is and learn that it means more than 'coming to church'. We need to pray, go deep into the Bible and be sustained for the task through the Eucharist. We need to practise loving each other within the Church so that we're better equipped to love those outside it: that means practising radical hospitality and listening to 'outsiders' and to the voiceless. We need to preach and practise a community that is about loving God and loving our neighbour. We need to realise how liberating generosity and risk are.
NASH, Mrs Abigail	Our challenge is to believe that the Good News of Jesus Christ is central to our purpose, and instructs every area of our lives – both individually and corporately. The Good News of Jesus Christ is for all people. Our diversity of backgrounds is proof of this. We may share this Good News in all sorts of creative and different ways, but if we are not united under and trusting in this, then we will struggle to work out the differences between us, and the future and shape of the Anglican Church. The Church is unique in holding out and offering the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our challenge is to continue doing this as the central aim and purpose for all the other good things that we may do or be involved in. If the Church does not proclaim the Good News, no-one else will. General Synod has a vital role in making sure that the way the Church of England is governed and held accountable is in accordance with this Good News. This will involve giving a strong lead in holding to traditional biblical principles for the good of the Church and the nation.

WILSON, Mrs Cynthia	Simply.....Faith under Fire. I sense that we are entering a time that is going to be very testing for Christians in the West. Our Christian brothers and sisters who have been inadvertently caught-up in warring countries have already been facing hugely demanding situations – and many have been murdered simply because they faithfully proclaim Christ as Lord of their lives. Do we imagine that this will not come to us? The question of how we address this unfolding new situation is to take the warnings seriously and ‘Wake Up’. We need to teach the <u>whole</u> Gospel truth - encouraging Christians to really know the foundations of their faith so that they are fully prepared spiritually.
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