

Autumn signals time for change



BY BISHOP ROB, COMMISSARY BISHOP

SEPTEMBER, gateway to autumn, a time of more chilly evenings, and, for many, the countdown to Christmas begins.

September also signifies those dreaded words, ‘back to school’. I know the adverts seem to start as soon as the summer holidays begin, but September is also that wonderful moment when children are dressed in clothes several sizes too big (“it’s OK, you’ll grow into it”), and I remember the sheer delight of a new pencil case or a new satchel. I’m sure that this betrays something of my age.

In each of these examples, September signifies change. A change of season, a change of year group, a change of school, a change of pace. For many of us, change is difficult. It reminds me of the rather unnerving joke: “How many Anglicans does it take to change a lightbulb?” “Change? We don’t change!”

Well, we do ‘do change’, and we have to change. The last couple of years has shown how capable we are of change, and indeed how difficult it can be. But change is also good. The fourth mark of mission speaks of challenging unjust structures of society, and such challenges bring change.

The recent Lament to Action report from the Archbishops’ Commission on Racism is a clear example of this. A call to change, to challenge unjust structures

of racism, can only take place through action and dedication.

I spend many days each year baptising and confirming, and at these services, I love to hear people’s testimonies. Testimonies often speak of change, sometimes painfully. Yet they often conclude that an encounter with Jesus Christ leads to a change of heart, a change of identity, a change in attitude and action.

This autumn, I’m praying that we change as a diocese – that God can enable his Church here to grow in depth, impact and number. The process on pages 4-5 will help us to establish the need for radical change, and I hope inspire us to make transformation happen.

Ultimately, I’m praying we all become more Christ-like, and that our yearning for discipleship continues. A disciple is a lifelong learner, and I pray that we each develop a learner’s heart: that we become eager to serve each other, to wash each other’s feet, and in the process, discover something of God’s truth. Especially in any culture change that we seek to develop, it begins with me, it begins with us.

Friends, may this September be a back to school for all of us. Take that step of faith and pray for a learner’s heart. This change may have some beautiful consequences.

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