



Read the Archbishop's speech in full as prepared:

It's just amazing looking around here and seeing the Church really full. It is pretty full most of the time because Al Gordon, the vicar here, does such an amazing job in this area. But to look around and see so many people here for this launch is fantastic and I feel deeply honoured to be here. I would have thought that if Joshua Watson, who started the National Society, or John Watson, who was his brother and the vicar here, if they could see this, they'd be rejoicing, they'd be full of celebration.

In this church there was launched, at the very beginning of the 19th century, the vision for a national education system. Isn't that an extraordinary thing? A vision for a national, not just a church, but a national education system. By 1870, it had grown so much that the state had to get involved because that vision had surpassed anything that could be imagined. And now we stand in this place of history, at this moment in history, this crucial moment in the history of our nation and of our world, and we look ahead to the future.

I'm overwhelmed by the fact that your work and your commitment to education and to young people through all the ups and downs, through all the horrifying and horrible years of COVID, through all the traumas and trials that come in every school so often, that your work has led to you being here today. You are a golden thread that weaves through the fabric of our society that shines on a dark cloth too often, with hope, with the gift of Christ, with the beauty of the love of God. And as part of that, it is such an extraordinary privilege to launch two initiatives this morning that seek to resource your school communities: difference for schools and flourish.

Flourish is a network of worshipping communities in schools. It has a really bold vision, which is to deepen the church's mission in education by pioneering worshipping communities in schools and colleges. Today marks the launch of a pilot programme of 40 of these worshipping communities with a vision for it to grow to 450 in the coming years.

Difference for secondary schools is free. It is a free six session resource, equipping students to cross divides, to disagree well, and to grow flourishing school communities. It's been developed in partnership with the Church of England Education Office and the reconciliation team at Lambeth Palace, and last year it was piloted in a number of schools across the country, and we've learned from those pilots in what is being launched today. Difference for primary schools is currently in development and will launch early next year.

We're in very complicated times. We had a dinner last night at Lambeth Palace with a bunch of really well known senior experts from all around the world, particularly focusing on how we're trying to help in the Middle East, but also elsewhere in the world where there's trouble, and the list is endless.

We talked about the outlook for the future, the risks of wider conflict, which might even involve this country. We talked about poverty and wealth and the fact that still, as when I was in Liverpool in 2008, if you move five miles north from the city centre you lose 15 years in life expectancy.

Three years per mile.

Our society is ever more complex, ever more intertwined through social media. And ever more struggling to grapple with differences and division in such a way that everyone can flourish.

Everyone has a good chance. Social media connects us in a way that we've never imagined possible, but also works to drive us ever further apart.

All of us know, and I know especially at the moment, I'm not going to go into debates in Parliament, but we know at the moment what it is to be trolled, to be threatened. It happens in school communities, it happens in local communities, it happens at a national and a global level.

We can end up just retreating to the echo chambers where we hear our own views given and other perspectives feel frightening. At the moment, and this year with 40% of the world's population having elections, even if some of them are effectively selections, 40% of the world, we're seeing wedge issues, political polarisation. AI is advancing rapidly and is a reality in our daily lives. It's not a threat, it is potentially a massive beneficial change, but it can't work in a society that hates each other.

It can't work, because it will then only be used to deepen hatred. In a society that looks out for each other, it can be utterly transformative.

And the answers aren't simple. The summary was given, I think, beautifully on September the 19th, by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Gutierrez. He said in his opening speech, a very powerful speech on his website, well worth reading, on September the 19th, he said to the UN General Assembly, our world is becoming unhinged, geopolitical tensions are rising, global challenges are mounting and we seem incapable of coming together to respond. In this context, the question of how society shapes those who are growing up, who are teenagers and children, how we educate, could not be more urgent and more essential, more fundamental to our whole future.

The kind of people we've just seen on the stage, the amazing choir, the teachers who lead them and train them, have an indispensable, critical role in fostering communities and societies where all can flourish. Not only as leaders of the future, but as key actors today and as participants in the future of the world.

I was challenged in a meeting on a project I chair called the Together Project, which organised things like the 'big help out' and the 'big lunch out' after the Coronation, by a remarkable young woman in her late 20s. She challenged me to accept a reverse mentoring relationship. And I was embarrassed, so I said yes. I met this incredible young woman called Deborah from South London. And I see her from time to time, I saw her a few weeks back. Every time I see her she teaches me to reimagine. If any of you haven't got a reverse mentor, get one. It's been life changing.

Youth leadership is utterly inspiring when you meet the people who are really good at it.

Reconciliation is one of the ways to capture the energy that there is in younger people, about climate change, about the long term future in which

they are deeply and profoundly invested. Reconciliation is one of the things they can become committed to, and they will change the world.

Saint Paul says in two Corinthians chapter five, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old is gone, the new is here. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. That's particularly important. If God can do that, we can do that. The absence of forgiveness in our world, in our country, is absolutely appalling. You post something stupid when you're 19 and you pay for it when you're 35, and you pay for it forever.

The last sentence of that, and he God has committed to us the message of reconciliation, is what 'Difference' is about. Reconciliation, says Emmanuel Katango Lee and Chris Rice from Duke Divinity School in the States, is about learning to live by a new imagination. I add, an imagination of a world where forgiveness is possible and hope spreads. God desires, they say, to shape lives and communities that reflect the story of God's new creation, offer concrete examples of another way, and practices that engage the everyday challenges of peaceful existence in the world. That is the call on every human being.

The privilege I have in my job, and I might suggest the privilege that very many of you have in your jobs, you have plenty of weights, so it's nice to find a privilege or two, I think the privilege is to be able to open, to young minds, the possibility of a world with less hatred in it.

It's a call that resonates very deeply with young people. Their passion for justice is a great marker. They dare to imagine and pursue a world where people all have the opportunity to flourish and where discrimination is not right. They have a lot to teach the church in that area. It's essential they're valued, empowered and equipped as reconciling leaders through lasting positive change.

The 'Growing Faith Foundation', which is being celebrated here today, recognises their key role. We are trying, as the Church of England, to put young people at the centre of what we do, in every area.

We're gathered today in a place where just a few individuals had the courage to imagine a new future for education, and thus a new future for the nation. What they did changed the nation. It worked. Thousands of schools rooted in Christ, many of which represented are represented today.

The Church of England's role became the Anglican Communion's role. Anglicans do three things in this world. They worship God, they run clinics and they teach. The fourth one is they argue quite a bit, but that's because they're human).

That sprang from him (Joshua Watson). That became what we did wherever we went. And that has been picked up, there are literally tens of thousands of church schools around the world. To enable children to thrive in every sense was the vision that Joshua Watson had, and that you

see flourishing. Now the baton is handed to you to take on to the next 200 years.

That means that children and young people need equipping with the wisdom, knowledge and skills and the joy, as Nigel said, to ask the big questions, to relate well to others, and to serve and contribute to their communities. Difference invites students and their educators to do it.

Education, like reconciliation, is about imagination. I met a guy in Philadelphia in August, I've met him many times before, but it's first time I went to his place. He's called Shane Claiborne. He lives in a part of Philadelphia where the people taking drugs in broad daylight are four deep on the pavement, and it's trunks and it's cocaine, and it's all kinds of appalling drugs that literally tear people's bodies apart, literally great wounds opened from inside in their flesh. It's called Kensington. It's not quite like Kensington in London. The only people who reach out to these folk are the churches, and Shane living there for 25 years, has built a community of churches of all shapes and sizes and sorts and backgrounds. They work together to meet the needs of that area. Everyone knows them.

One of the things his own church community does, is they have a great big bin into which people put guns, there's gunfire the whole time. They put in guns and they have a forge and they melt down the guns, or they cut them up with special tools, and they turn them into tools for the household and crosses. He gave me a cross made out of the remnants of an AK47. It's extraordinary.

There's an irony, an odd story there that because they get the guns in the bin and the guns in the bin work, he had to get a gun permit in the city of Philadelphia. And when he applied for a gun permit, he was refused a gun permit because he has a long criminal record, because he's been arrested so often for demonstrating against the use of guns. I would say you couldn't believe it, but you work in schools and have to deal with schools bureaucracy, I'm sure you can.

'Flourish' and 'Difference' is like what Shane is doing with those guns. It takes what could be used, and is used, sometimes for harm, and transforms it. He also rebuilds houses to put people in. Derelict houses in a derelict area. And because of all the work they do, they rebuild people.

This is about rebuilding people. Be curious, be present, reimagine. Have worshipping communities in your schools. Build on the work of growing faith. My prayer is that through each flourish community and through 'Difference', young people and those who teach them will experience life giving encounters with Jesus Christ, the source of all life. Nothing manipulated, just because he loves them and they find that out for themselves.

Jesus stretched the imaginations of those he encountered. Through parables that turned expectations on their heads, through stories, through miracles, through his own resurrection.

I want to end by thanking you because your role is so, so utterly demanding. But it is literally world transforming. Through your work, young

people learn to live by a new imagination in which a better future is possible, and will come into being as they make it happen. They discover the meaning of Jesus's words that he comes to give life in all its fullness. I pray that this is something that you will know amidst the strains and the stresses and the pressures of your own lives.

So let's pray to finish before you go and get some coffee and tea and so on.

God is here by his spirit. Come Holy Spirit, in Jesus name. For those here who feel hope is in short supply and the problems of tomorrow make the planning of the long-term look an absurd effort, give them hope, of knowing your love afresh, of being given strength and resilience, and of seeing transformation.

For the young people here and the young people in the charge of those here, Holy Spirit come. Open their eyes to a better future than the one that the previous generation has created. And Holy Spirit, we do not come to tell you to bless 'Flourish' and 'Difference', but because we have sought to obey you in doing this work, in Jesus name, because we can do nothing without you. Come and transform students and educators, build communities of reconciliation and fill us with joy. Come Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus. Amen. Thank you.

11 min read

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