



Introducing a presentation on a report by the Archbishops' Evangelism Task Group, the Archbishop said: "Evangelism is the proclamation, the setting forth, the holding out of the Good news of Jesus Christ, in ways that do justice to the beauty, integrity, joy and power of the one who was dead but is now alive. . . It is from God, about God, with God and because of God. Above all, He calls and enables us to be his heralds.

"All Christians are witnesses of the love of Jesus Christ. The Spirit comes to us for precisely this task. And as witnesses of Jesus we then become witnesses to Jesus, relaying what we have experienced to others."

*Read the text of the Archbishop's opening remarks:*

"I'd like to start by thanking the members of the Archbishops' Task Group [on Evangelism and Witness]. The Archbishop of York is not here because he is on sabbatical going round his diocese on an evangelistic pilgrimage. And I think we would want to acknowledge at this point his extraordinary commitment to evangelism in his own province, the way in which he has led in mission and evangelism in his ministry, and what he is doing at the moment; doing an on-foot pilgrimage around the whole of the Diocese of York is a typical example of the way that he leads. So we pray for him and for blessing on his ministry in these months. . .

"The high points of the calling to serve God in His Church are the times when he works to draw people to himself. The times when hearts begin to thaw with his love, eyes open to his light, and shoulders lift as He comes alongside to bear burdens, as those who have carried around guilt, like in the Pilgrim's Progress, that has weighed down memory with regret and shame know a freedom and release they never dreamt possible, as those who assumed that they had no worth realise their inestimable and infinite worth to God.

"God works through his Spirit to draw people to open their hands to receive his love and transforming power - and we have the huge privilege of seeing this happen. For me some of the most memorable and grace-filled moments of the last three years have been seeing God at work in the lives of those who would not call themselves Christians, but who I have had the privilege of seeing gently and profoundly drawn to Jesus Christ.

"This is our duty, our privilege and our joy. There is nothing like it.

"For too long the ministry of evangelism in the church has been viewed as an app on the system. I don't know what kind of apps you have on your mobile device. . . but some of you will know that apps are simply add-ons, optional extras, suited to those with particular interests and activities. As I said, for many it seems that evangelism is such an app – simply to be used for those who are gifted, who don't mind being out of their comfort zones, who are happy talking about faith with strangers, and have a clever way of explaining the mysteries of God's love.

"But evangelism and witness are not an app. They are the operating system itself.

"Evangelism is the proclamation, the setting forth, the holding out of the Good news of Jesus Christ, in ways that do justice to the beauty, integrity, joy and power of the one who was dead and is now alive. The one who lived for us, died for us, rose for us, ascended and prays for us. It is from God, about God, with God and because of God. Above all, He calls and enables us to be his heralds - those who proclaim the Good News.

"All Christians are witnesses of the love of Jesus Christ. The Spirit comes to us precisely for this task. And as witnesses of Jesus we then become witnesses to Jesus, relaying what we have experienced and what we have known to others.

"The Archbishop of York and I set up this Task Group because we want to recall the Church of England to the operating system of the love that overflows in evangelism. Many have been engaged within the church for many years in evangelism. This is not new to many, if not most, of those sitting here today and indeed in the Church of England. It was set out in "Towards the Conversion of England" in 1945 that every local church should live to see those who know nothing of God's love hear, see, taste and accept his gracious presence in their lives. This commitment is seen in our prayers, our budgets, our diaries, our resources and our planning.

"In the presentation that follows, drawing on the history of commitment to evangelism that has existed in the Church of England and in God's church globally, we will highlight three particular areas of attention, which the Task Group has seen as urgent. Bishop Paul Bayes will then lead through a 'Take Note' debate, something we felt, in liaison with the Business Committee and having carefully listened to comments from the floor in November, that would enable members of Synod to participate fully in discussing how we might be increasingly devoted as a church, without exception, to evangelism and witness.

"I hope we can be very clear about one thing. A commitment to evangelism and witness comes out of love, not out of fear. It comes out of obedience to Christ, not out of a concern at the latest figures on church attendance. It is a sign of our discipleship, not a church growth strategy or a survival technique. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 14-15: 'For Christ's love compels us' - or, in the King James Version, 'constrains us' - 'because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.'

"A prayerful, sensitive, respectful, love-filled renewal of evangelism and witness will renew the whole church. It will renew each of us deeply. For as I said a few moments ago, there is nothing as wonderful as seeing God at work leading people from darkness to light."

