

Vision Groups Synod Presentation: Continuing to Live the Vision

Outstanding Leadership: St. Hilda of Whitby

Written and read by

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Alas, it's a challenging thing to be a leader in God's church today. Here we are in 675 A.D., with more than six hundred years of practice!, and we Christians are still learning what it is to passionately follow Christ and to share our faith with others. However, as I dream of the difference that the Christian Church might make to Saxon England, I am convinced that outstanding leadership will always be a key component in effectively fulfilling the ministry to which God calls us.



I am Hilda, Abbess of the Monastery at Whitby. Twenty-eight years ago, at the age of thirty-three, I was in East Anglia for a year, preparing to travel by ship to Caes, France to join my sister. However, I was contacted by Aidan, Bishop of Lindisfarne in Northumbria, to found a monastery north of the River Wear, and I agreed to do so. A year later, Bishop Aidan suggested that I was ready for further responsibilities, and I was appointed Superior in the religious house at Hartlepool. Then, eighteen years ago, Bishop Aidan moved me to this place, to re-found the monastery at Whitby. Here I give spiritual leadership to a community of both women and men who have devoted their lives to serving God, living in separate small houses but worshipping together at the Abbey.

Thanks to the vision and encouragement of our Bishop, and a commitment to the scholarly reading and study of Scripture, a determination to work for justice, and constant striving to live together in peace and love, our monastery has become an important centre for religious learning in Northumbria. My role has been one of using my skills and energy both in my own ministries of administration, teaching and spiritual direction, and in encouraging and developing other leaders—offering guidance to the kings and noblemen who come to me for advice, mentoring the five young men of this community who have been called to episcopal leadership, discerning and affirming the wonderful poetic gifts of Caedmon the herdsman, supporting and resourcing the many ordinary folks I employ to care for sheep and cattle, in farming and woodcutting.

Leadership takes faith, courage, wisdom, and maturity; it involves taking risks and embracing change. For example, my experience in presiding at the Synod of Whitby held here at the Abbey in 664, with debates about the date of Easter, types of tonsures, Celtic versus Roman customs, was not an easy one. The decision to adopt the Roman method of doing church has meant a transformation of our ways in this monastery. However, in order to foster a climate of mission and to further build community in the wider church, I have learned to how important it is to be open and creative, to think reflectively and critically, and to value the opinions of others with humility and grace.

It is my prayer that the leadership I offer will continue to inspire and motivate others to boldly live out God's mission in the world.