



Imagining the future

A conversation together



Introduction

I have now been your Bishop for almost a year. As you will know, I have been spending much of my time visiting clergy in their homes and getting round each deanery. I have also visited a significant number of our schools. I have been listening carefully and reflecting upon what I have heard. I do not claim that I yet know the Diocese intimately; but I have been learning fast and working to build relationships of mutual affection and trust. At the same time, in sermons, talks and video presentations I have been seeking a conversation with you about what a rich future might look like.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion told the stranger who had joined them on the road what they had expected, which had not turned out as they had hoped. This could also be true of us: we had hoped that the Church would continue in its current shape, but this cannot be.

That stranger on the Emmaus road with them, however, turned out to be the Risen Christ, who instructed them in the Scriptures and showed them that it was not a time to remain in grief but to trust in the promise in Jesus's predictions of his passion: he would die, but be raised again on the third day. Being unprepared for the reality of the death, they could not accept the certain promise of new life. It is deep in our DNA as Christians that we only enjoy Easter Day because we have come to the cross on Good Friday. We are Easter People through being Calvary's Children.

We turn to Christ to get a life as adventurous disciples. Everything is rooted in our growing into the character of Christ, being cross-shaped people who have a joyful and playful trust in the risen life of Christ. Now is the time to reclaim the rich fullness of our faith by putting down deeper roots in prayer, study and celebration so that we can all hear the call of the Christ who comes to us, stays with us and sends us.

What follows is definitely not a strategy document. It is describing what I see about us now and a vision of what we might become together. I have said repeatedly that the Kingdom of God is growing in our midst. We have confidence in the God who transforms lives and brings hope to individuals and communities. Strategies and policies will follow from our vision of God. God is in charge. So much of what we hope for is not set by structures or a long string of initiatives, but by culture and tone.

When I share the cure of souls with the clergy, this is not primarily about hierarchically delegated responsibility, but about the distribution of authority around and among those called to exercise it for the sake of God's mission. Therefore it is the calling of all of us to find out what God is doing in our midst and then to join in. We are confident in the fullness of God's power and the abundance of His mercy as we embrace the challenges of being a growing diocese.

This discussion document is an invitation to join in and imagine the future together.

Purpose, Passion, People, Place and Plan

“You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”
(John 15.14-15)

I have sought to distil my thinking and praying into themes which accurately reflect who we faithfully are, as friends and companions of Jesus, and where we hopefully might be led by God. I have come up with Five Ps:

- Our **Purpose** is to Radiate the Light and Love of Jesus
- Our **Passion** is for God's World
- We are **People** Called to be Fully Alive as God's Companions
- We Live, Worship and Serve in Real **Places**
- We need **Plans** to put our Purpose and Passion into effect and to get the best out of People



Purpose

Purposeful sharing of the light and love of Jesus

The God of mission chose a Church. It is not that the Church has a mission in its own right. I love the way light spills into a dark room through an open door. I am drawn to a well-cared for open fire which heats the room and radiates light and steady warmth. We are called to be lights of the One Light, Christ himself. We radiate the light and warmth of Jesus, the true Fire of Love. We are called to pulse with the light of the gospel, not as flares so much as beams, always emanating from the same constant source. Some of the best paintings show light emerging from inside the picture and not always coming from outside. We are light radiating from the inside of God's canvas, which for us is Cambridgeshire and West Norfolk and every other part of the world with which we are linked.

Purposeful Witness

The test for us is to show the attractive evidence of our having the light of life. Here are a number of ways in which we might do this:

- Be purposeful and faithful in all we undertake in God's name
- In all of our worship and service, to settle for nothing but the highest quality in the delivery and content of worship and preaching so that Christ's saving work is proclaimed and experienced
- Be evangelistic and adventurous in our practice and planning as the churches we can imagine ourselves becoming
- Recognise that for Jesus the centre is often at the edge, not in the middle of things and so not be afraid on being on the edge for love and truth
- Work earnestly and imaginatively to bring together Mission Action Plans of benefices and the Pastoral Plan of the deaneries with the emphasis on what new things we might try and what existing things we might stop altogether

- Equip all clergy and other ministers for readiness to lead, taking risks for the sake of new mission initiatives and healthy expressions of church, whether fresh or refreshed
- Support pioneer ministries wisely and engage seriously and generously with the possibilities of church grafting and church planting beyond the orbit of Cambridge
- Expect to share not only good practice but also expertise and resources across deaneries
- Demonstrate our conviction that what we undertake is sustainable – mission and clergy well-being go together
- Learn with the Cathedral how to respond most openly and imaginatively to growing congregations at major festivals and events
- Develop and support effective and intelligent apologetics addressed to all sections of the community, not least to students and all young people, enlisting young people themselves
- Build on good practice in mission among children - at church, at home and at school

Purposeful Investment

The generosity of God's call to redeemed sinners like us releases thanksgiving and risky generosity. A recession is not just a time of retrenchment but an opportunity to review where our key commitments lie as stewards of God's plenty given to us. We need to refresh our approach to stewardship and giving which will make new mission possible. When I arrived last year, I introduced three principles to which local communities should aspire. These are to be:

- self-sustaining,
- contributing
- investing

From 2013, the Diocesan Budget will provide seed funding for a Diocesan Mission Investment Fund. Deaneries, parishes and individuals will be encouraged to contribute to this fund, to which local groups and other networks can make worked-out bids for particular pieces of mission activity. We need to work out together how best to deploy this resource both rigorously and adventurously.

I am seeking wisdom and existing good practice in this area. Transferring some of our inherited resource to this fund will inevitably require that we be more purposeful about how we apply subsidy to existing parish share. We need to envisage together how this will be shaped and how deaneries and parishes propose to address hard questions around expectations and capacity-building, with proper support from the centre.

Purposeful Partnership

Engaging in God's mission calls us into the discipline of partnership with other Christians:

- Across the Diocese and in our deaneries, re-asserting mutual support
- In company with our neighbouring dioceses to serve our region
- With the rest of the Church of England, seeking to re-indigenise the gospel in our nation
- With Sister Churches, building unity by looking outward
- With Public Sector Chaplaincy, revealing the gospel in tough situations
- With Chaplaincy in our Universities and Colleges, promoting the gospel in the environment of enquiry and challenge
- With our schools, both church and local authority, looking for every opportunity to develop our schools as centres of mission and, potentially, of fresh expressions of church
- With the World Church, supporting existing creative relationships and looking for opportunities to express mutual energy for mission



Passion for God's world

The Church's ministry is a dynamic move between Christmas and Easter: God first comes to share our life and then transforms it through the cross into his New Creation. Jesus is Emmanuel, 'God-is-with-us'.

Even in the womb, Jesus inspired his mother to proclaim the Magnificat, distilling the Bible's wonderful call to righteousness and justice (Luke 1.46-55). The invitation before us, is to imagine what it might be to join in Mary's song. God calls us to believe that we are here to serve the cause of Jesus, to turn the world the right way up through his love, forgiveness and peace. This is not some airy-fairy wish, but a fervent hope that we can be so heavenly-minded that we shall be of great earthly use together as one family in Christ.

We can strive to be heavenly-minded and of earthly use:

- by opposing cynicism, fantasy and denial, and putting in their place the reality of sin, the hope of forgiveness and the truth of redemption in Jesus Christ.
- by being evidence of God's blessing and the blessing of service to God (read Matthew 5.3-12). As servants of righteousness, we will get our focus right. If we pray and live for the kingdom, it will become evident in our midst.
- by being active citizens of this world because we are fuelled by our citizenship of heaven. Many will continue to respond to the call to service in some form of public life – MPs, district and parish councillors, school governors, NHS trustees, prison and hospice visitors, workers in charity shops and every kind of volunteer. As we get better at joining up the dots, the wider community will better understand our motivation for serving.
- by continuing to be deeply concerned about criminal justice and prisoners, about mental health and a wide range of issues which directly affect people in our own communities.



- by following up Bishop David's initiative to draw together partners to engage with the future of our economy and its just sustainability, always seeking to grow social as well as commercial capital.
- by continuing our commitment to those whose lives are particularly tough, both in urban and rural parts of the Diocese
- by continuing to work with partners like Cambridgeshire ACRE in supporting the rural community and economy.
- by supporting those of our clergy and other Christians involved in research and innovation in medical science and more generally in scientific innovation and engaging in dialogue about ethical application.
- by (in larger numbers) becoming writers of letters, reminding the powerful about particular injustices and declaring oppression for what it is, and ensuring that bad things do not happen because the good people are silent.
- by continuing to develop our theological and practical understanding of the environment, both locally and globally.
- by developing our self-understanding as a Fair Trade Diocese, and by being vigilant about issues of trade justice and the challenge of debt.
- by determining to be at the forefront of imaginative recycling and saving of resources and energy and to encourage the growth of eco-congregations.
- by continuing to explore the use of churchyards not just as gardens of the resurrection but as habitats for plants and animals.



People fully alive as God's companions

Wherever Jesus went he gathered friends around him. He still does. We claim companionship with God because he no longer calls us servants but friends.

To be God's friend is our highest ambition but it can feel like our greatest failure. We need to rely profoundly on the Holy Spirit praying in us. Friends need to keep in touch. Jesus is always moving towards us, leaping over all the barriers we erect to keep him at bay. In our discussion of various 'p's we need to include penitence, too. We need to be stripped for action by our sorrow for sin and our readiness to accept the forgiveness of Christ. He longs to forgive us so that we can step up to the mark as adventurous disciples. We cannot reach the bar ourselves; but Jesus is all the lift we need.

We should desire a character of friendship which makes us friends and companions with each other, and reveals our companionship with God. Our ministry should express not just a sense of community which is human, but the bonds of communion which is divine, the pure gift of sharing the life of the Trinity. Communion is God's gift but we are the ones who can break it.

The most important part of communication is listening. We are always tempted to rush into action; but we must follow the pattern of Jesus and make the time to leave the crowd and go to a quiet place to reflect and pray. Individual disciples often benefit from a Rule of Life. This puts the flesh on the promise to pray and study the Bible, to be regular at the Holy Communion, and to pray in silence, at home and on retreat. How do we hear the good news if we are noisy Christians? Perhaps we should work on a Rule of Life for the Diocese of Ely, setting out some key characteristics of the common life in Christ for busy people. My urging us to do less business in Lent and to make more time to meet each other for prayer and conversation is a way of making a start on this. We need to recognise more clearly that the gospel is in the most radical way habit-forming.



It is a shape to be inhabited and lived. We might build on the example of the Community of St Etheldreda, formed in 2005 to promote the spiritual life of the Cathedral. Their Rule is a simple one based on the Benedictine Rule, and can be viewed by following this link: www.elycathedral.org/worship/spirituality.html#rule.

I do know that we need to develop a robust spirituality which lives the mystery and looks outward into courageous mission and sacrificial ministry. I am always thrilled when I meet people who are living translations of the Gospel. If we seek the real presence of Christ not only in the Eucharist but also in the Word proclaimed and lived, then we shall bear fruit.

People Engaged in Ministry

We need to imagine a future in which there is more ministry, not less. We need to release gifts, and then nurture and deploy them. Each of us is given gifts by God for the building up of the whole body. No one is exempt. The most elderly can still pray and young children disciple their families.

Baptism is not only the sacrament of belonging but also the fundamental commission to be a disciple and witness. We need to equip the laity to exercise their proper authority. We need to learn that baptism trumps ordination. Clergy and bishops are raised up by the People of God, not the other way round.

The encouragement and discernment of vocations to a whole range of Christian callings, not least to teaching, will remain a key investment. We need to pay attention to how we shall release the call of some to various specific ministries, lay as well as ordained. We need well-trained lay theologians and teachers who undergo intensive and extensive training, a role for a re-invigorated body of Licensed Lay Ministers. We need to imagine how further to develop a wider set of ALMs.

We need to get better at honouring the gifts and experience that people already have, whether as part of their on-going formation or as a freer approach to commissioning people to preach and lead worship.

Most categories of ministry are growing. We need to break out of the mind-set which only sees the number of stipendiary vicars as the acid test of growth or decline. The overall 'workforce' is greater than it has ever been.

One of the ways in which Mission Action Planning and Pastoral Plans need to come together more closely is in the whole area of deployment of all clergy. We are invited to imagine what it might look like if we deployed 'episcopal' stipendiary clergy with wider oversight and a strategic mission emphasis and 'diaconal' local clergy as volunteers.

There is scope for deploying paid specialist lay ministers where they can be afforded within a deanery allocation, with funding for a pioneer minister, or a specialist like a deanery schools' minister.

I would like the Diocese to commit itself

- to ordaining the full complement of stipendiary curates allocated to Ely nationally as a direct investment in the future
- to encouraging Churches which generate vocations to the ordained ministry, especially those of very particular traditions, to equip ordinands confidently to serve in a variety of church contexts in the Diocese and wider Church of England
- to keeping up our commitment to ensuring the best possible formation and training for our ordinands and to seek to work even more closely with training partners in the region
- to celebrating with those individual parishes which have been able to invest in additional specialist staff, lay and ordained, from their own resources. Long may this continue in a spirit of cooperation with the Bishop and with the Deanery.
- to seeking ways to rejoice with our larger churches and to have more imaginative partnerships with them, so that they see themselves more clearly as assets for the Diocese as a whole
- to rejoicing with churches keeping the gospel bright in tough and brittle places where we need to continue to invest in ministry or lose our vocation as the Church of England.
- to celebrating the fact that we are lifelong learners and to doing that learning with others

I am painting a picture of the changing culture which is already developing. Clergy will be at the front line of these changes. Discerning together expectations and trends is going to be vitally important

The Diocese already has good patterns of shared ministry and some good training to support it. This is going to be reinforced in future by the approach we shall have to clergy job descriptions and training and support for new incumbents, alongside the laity

The 2nd-century Church Father, Irenaeus of Lyons, wrote that 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive'. We are called to encourage one another to grow into the full stature of Christ, responding to the invitation to flourish as we are shaped by his character

Living, worshipping and serving in real places

The unique responsibility of the Church of England is for the whole turf. It embraces the crucial ministry of 'being there', locally, on the ground.

Recent figures reveal that healthy growth is happening, particularly in our engaging with children. The Back to Church Sunday initiative is reaping a good harvest. Even where there are fewer signs of encouragement, we celebrate the faithfulness of people who do not give up hope and who ensure that God is more than a rumour in their communities. We need to build on this resilience and face change. Below I have suggested headings for some serious reflection about how we abide in particular places and radiate the love of Jesus.

Local Presence

Our special calling as the Church of England is that we are given 'the cure of souls' in every place. 'Local' often feels to us like settled community, but in reality it is not. We need to work out what local means to us and to those who live around us as we head towards the future.



Sustainable Presence

Our investment in the future will have these and other characteristics still to be imagined:

- developing the local resources to be the Church in the local place with support from the centre
- creating rotas for Sundays which allow the incumbent time to meet each congregation outside the act of worship for real pastoral contact
- becoming vivid communities of the Word, worshipping as the laity in every church that desires weekly worship with training for worship leaders and coming together in larger combinations for celebration
- enjoying the Parish Communion but not necessarily on Sunday and learning to be sacramental travellers, attending the Holy Communion in another church in the benefice
- holding services at the same time each week even when the style changes so that people know when to come
- worshipping for at least part of the year in a hall or school which is warmer and more central to the population
- being more explicit about being pastors to one another so that the clergy are pastors to and among a multitude of other pastors. This creates realism about what the vicar alone can do, while guaranteeing one or more focal ministers to whom people can relate.

Use of Buildings

Our churches are sacraments in stone of the glory of God in our communities. We want to capitalise on the passion that people feel about their church building, whether they are regular worshippers or not.

The church belongs to the whole community; but we have to be faithful and realistic as the people who have the honour to care and finance as well as to worship and minister.

Most of our churches will be used for worship every week in town and country, but not all. Some will concentrate on being festival churches, putting energy into particular events during the year but not all year round. Others will have only seasonal use because of heating and access issues. A much smaller number will act as shrines, kept open and available for the prayer of visitors and pilgrims.

In this mix there will be natural and locally identified 'hub' churches which will have at least one main act of worship at the same time each Sunday. We shall not put energy into closing any churches except where the deterioration of the building and decline of the population gives us little choice. Most often, there will be another place where worship can continue in that community.

Adaptability of Church Buildings as Community Assets

Our aim is to encourage PCCs actively to engage with partners in the community to find creative ways of breathing new life into our church buildings as community assets. In the past, the Nave was always regarded as a public community space. We are encouraged to re-discover this in the 21st century.

We need to take further a sharing of responsibility for and funding of our parish churches with Friends' groups. The DAC is committed to helping churches realise their potential and to opening our churches for a wide variety of community activities.

Plans

How will we harness our purpose and passion to get the best out of people in each place?

Our vision and culture as disciples who radiate the light and love of Jesus is meant to inspire and inform our planning and activity. There is no getting away from the urgency to love people into life as we know the love of Jesus. We live to love and love to live. Peter betrayed his friend, Jesus. That same Jesus, risen from the dead, restored Peter and commissioned him to look after the sheep (John 21.15). Normally, shepherds live off the sheep. We live off the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Many of you will have seen my video about Mission Action Plans. I am making this conversation explicit because I want us to be making plans locally which respond to Christ's invitation to join his movement towards all our neighbours. I want us to be confident in Christ together and ready to make plans in our deaneries and parishes which demonstrate that we are ready to be adventurous and vivid in God's mission. I return again and again to St Paul's words to the Corinthians that as ministers of the New Covenant, they were 'a letter of Christ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts' (2 Cor 3.3). I want this to be us.

I look forward to hearing from you as we imagine the future together.

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. (John 15.16)

Bishop Stephen

