

# Way of Life

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#### **Preface**

This Handbook is an essential guide for anyone leading a group through the *Way of Life* as an accompaniment to the *Way of Life* Workbook. It may also be used by group members and individuals who want immediate access to some of the main theological background and ideas that run through the *Way of Life*.

In this Handbook you will find

- Background information about the Ely Way of Life
- Explanation of the structure of the Way of Life
- Key concepts to help understand how the Way of Life works
- Suggestions on how to work through each section of the Way of Life

Leaders will find it helpful to read through all of the material in this book before they plan how to lead a particular group through the *Way of Life*, focusing on practical engagement with the Workbook. While the basic structure of the *Way of Life* is given, different approaches will be appropriate in different settings, so leaders are encouraged to use their own wisdom in deciding how to introduce and work through the content.

The materials supporting the *Way of Life* might look like a study course, but they are not meant to be treated in that way. The aim is not to get through a course: the aim is to use the structure of the *Way of Life* to develop a way of living which doesn't end on the last page, and will sometimes entail going back to the beginning again. The *Way of Life* materials are offered to inspire and challenge, and to raise questions about where the Holy Spirit may be leading.

Anyone may use this booklet in any context, of course, but the diocesan vision is of a *Way of Life* that is lived together with others, not alone, so the *Way of Life* is ideally explored in fellowship, to help shape Christian communities as well as the lives of individual Christians.

Additional materials and resources can be found at http://www.elydiocese.org/supporting-parishes/parish-resources/way-life

### The Commission

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Over the centuries Christians have produced a variety of Ways of Life. Some people in Ely diocese already follow one of these and we want to encourage them wholeheartedly; but we also want to offer something for everyone. The Church of England provides a base for this in the "Commission" which comes at the end of its services for baptism and confirmation:

Those who are baptized are called to worship and serve God.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

With the help of God, I will.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? With the help of God, I will.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? With the help of God, I will.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself? With the help of God, I will.

Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society, by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking peace and justice? With the help of God, I will.

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, that you may be rooted and grounded in love and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

Amen.

Common Worship: Christian Initiation © The Archbishops' Council 2006

Our diocesan *Way of Life* seeks to draw out what this commission might look like in practice.

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### Introduction

At the heart of our strategy is an expectation that God is at work in our midst. By 2025 we aim to "raise the spiritual temperature" of the diocese. We therefore propose to develop a diocesan "Rule of Life", setting out the core elements of a living Christian faith, which everyone will be invited to live out in their own way.

(Ely 2025 People Fully Alive)

God longs for everyone to grow into the "full stature of Christ" (Eph.4.13), which is to become *fully alive* (Jn.10.10). This is already happening of course, but we believe the Holy Spirit is inviting us to do more to help each other grow.

Spiritual growth is always a gift from God, but we know from the witness of the Bible, the tradition of the church and the experience of the saints that it doesn't happen by accident. For this reason individual Christians and church groups have often adopted particular patterns for living their faith more deeply. These have often been known as "Rules" of life, however we prefer the term "Way", for two reasons. First, the Bible tells us that people who committed themselves to Jesus were originally known as "followers of the way" (e.g. Acts 22.4). Secondly, the word "rule" can sound a bit negative, so a "Rule of Life" might suggest a one-size-fits-all "spiritual straightjacket", which is not what we intend. The diocesan *Way of Life* invites us to think about how we can open every part of our lives to the transforming power of God's grace, but leaves it up to each person or group to decide how they will make the journey.

A Way of Life can help us to be more intentional about our spiritual growth: we really want it to happen and will take steps to ensure that it does. It can also help us to be more accountable in living out our faith: it reminds us not to forget what is important and helps us to stay committed.

Discipleship, in the Christian community, is not primarily about an individual or private spiritual journey, but about being transformed, alongside others, into the likeness of Christ in order to model a new world

order which makes the Gospel visible: the church is a sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom. This is our diocesan vision - **We pray to be generous and visible people of Jesus Christ** - and our shared *Way of Life* is one step towards making that vision a reality. It also provides a strong foundation for **nurturing a confident people of God** and **growing healthy churches**.

#### In brief...

- The Way of Life is an essential part of the diocesan strategy.
- "Raising the spiritual temperature" is a priority.
- The Ely Way of Life emerges from a history of tradition and teaching about intentional patterns of Christian living.
- It is important to see that Christians are all followers of "the Way", but that each person's path will be different.
- Accountability has an important place in the Christian life.
- There is an essential connection between the individual Christian and the wider church in terms of a full expression of discipleship.

## **Key Concepts**

Every church group is invited to think about how the diocesan *Way of Life* might shape its own particular way of life. The method for doing this will vary depending on whether the group is a PCC, for example, or a Fresh Expression, or a Youth Group or a whole congregation, but as you plan your approach to the *Way of Life* there are a few key concepts to think about. Each of these is important in its own right, but together they are designed to help groups of Christians talk about their faith, and the impact it has—or doesn't always have—on their life, in order to seek transformation and renewal. Not everyone finds it easy to open up to others in this way, and leaders may sometimes find it difficult to be vulnerable too, so it is something to work on together, with care and sensitivity.

- Different church groups will be familiar and comfortable with different styles of **praying** together, which is fine, though working with the *Way of Life* could be an opportunity to explore other approaches (please visit http://www.elydiocese.org/supporting-parishes/parish-resources/way-life for suggestions). Leaders are encouraged to think beyond the familiar pattern of using prayer to "top and tail" a meeting—though that is no bad thing—and to give space for prayer and prayerful reflection at any and every point. If prayer is to be honest and deep, a mixture of spoken and silent prayer may be helpful to bring thoughts, feelings, insights and uncertainties before God.
- The diocesan strategy recommends the use of **Dwelling in the Word** (see Appendix for a user-guide). Dwelling in the Word makes space for an open and personal response to the scriptures, and for group discernment. Its use in the *Way of Life* should encourage active engagement with the materials, giving people time to explore their thoughts and feelings, and enabling their voices to be heard in dialogue with the scriptures.

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• Intentionality is a fashionable word in today's church to describe the importance of directing our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires and hopes towards living a fully Christian life. Without this kind of holistic engagement the Way of Life might become empty words. If the Way of Life is never a focus of specific, practical and realistic intention it will not make any difference to our everyday lives. A key question for leaders and groups will therefore be: If we are serious about growing as disciples, what do we intend to do about it? Leaders will encourage groups to be:

Specific — how...? when...? where...? by/with whom...?

**Practical** — what help or resources do I/we need?

**Realistic** — don't take on too much or set impossible goals.

• Christians believe that their ultimate **accountability** is to God, but God has given us a church family in which we support and nurture one another. Accountability within the church is largely about sharing the truth for mutual benefit and encouragement—"speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4.15-16 NIV). Groups should think about what model of accountability might help them to live out the *Way of Life*. Those focused on church business, governance and leadership might already have forms of evaluation and review which could be adapted to include the *Way of Life*. Other examples of accountability might include prayer partnerships; fellowship groups; spiritual direction; a standing item on the PCC agenda; an annual report to the APCM, etc.

### † In brief...

- **Prayer** is essential to our engagement with the *Way of Life*, and different types and styles of praying may be helpful.
- **Dwelling in the Word** offers a rich experience of listening, sharing and discernment, and intertwines the unfolding story of our *Way of Life* with the biblical narrative.
- An emphasis on **intentionality** encourages focused attention on attitudes and practices which will actually transform our *Way of Life*.
- A commitment to **accountability** should ensure that our *Way of Life* doesn't drift, but actively seeks to evolve and renew itself.

The materials for the *Way of Life* are divided according to the five sections of the Commission. There is also an introductory section designed to highlight the corporate nature of Christian discipleship. This exploration of what it means to be on the *Way of Life* together is important because there is a strong tendency in our culture to focus mainly on the individual.

Leaders are encouraged to draw on their own experience and wisdom to design each session in ways appropriate to their group's style and context, but this Handbook gives an example structure and materials, which may be used without adaptation or as a springboard for those who wish to develop their own approach and input. The accompanying Workbook is an essential tool for group members, providing space for reflection, journaling and discernment.

Resources for prayer can be found on the *Way of Life* website http://www.elydiocese.org/supporting-parishes/parish-resources/way-life, and groups are encouraged to make regular use of the Ely 2025 Strategy Prayer, perhaps at the beginning and/or end of each session:

We praise and thank you, God of the journey, for all your gifts to us in the past. We look to you as fellow-traveller and faithful companion on the way ahead. Shelter and protect us from all harm and anxiety; give us grace to let go of all that holds us back; and grant us courage to meet the new life you have promised us In Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.** 

Despite the format of the Handbook and Workbook this is not a course but a *Way of Life*. Each group's journey through the *Way of Life* may include ups and downs, circular routes and even dead ends. Sometimes it will require a few steps in a direction to see what is on the next horizon, and there may need to be times of rest and opportunities to revisit certain stages along the way, so it is fine to move backwards and forwards across the sections and materials. The aim is not to complete the course but to grow and be transformed through the process of engagement.

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### Suggested session outline (1.5 hours)

#### **Opening Prayers—5 minutes**

- This might be a good point to use the Ely 2025 Strategy Prayer.
- Some kind of stilling/centring prayer exercise might help to generate a spirit of attentive openness.

#### Conversation—10 minutes

- It may be appropriate to begin by inviting any further reflections from the previous session.
- Group members are invited to discuss their first impressions of the session topic, noting any positive or negative thoughts and feelings.
- Leaders should encourage everyone to contribute, if possible, helping people to find their voice in the group.

#### Dwell in the Word—15 minutes

• Bible passages are suggested in the session notes.

#### Leader Input—10 minutes

• Draw on the general background material provided in the Handbook to offer a theological orientation to the topic.

#### Reflection Time—5 minutes

 Before launching into group discussion it might be helpful to pause and allow people to take stock and assimilate all that they have encountered so far in the session. This may be particularly helpful for introverts to prepare to share in the group discussion.

#### **Group Discussion—20 minutes**

• Leaders and group members may be very forthcoming with discussion topics and ideas of their own, but the session materials include sample "things to think about" to help get the discussion started, if necessary.

#### Discernment—20 minutes

• The aim is to pull the session together with a view to proposing specific, practical and realistic next steps, for individuals and the group (examples are given for illustration).

#### Closing Prayer—5 minutes

This topic "sets the scene" for the following sessions. The materials below are offered in case leaders believe their groups would benefit from an extended exploration of the theme as an introduction to the Way of Life, but it may be equally appropriate to incorporate it in an abbreviated form in the first session. The complete text of the Commission could be reviewed to provide a general overview of what is to come.

Dwelling in the Word: Acts 2.37-47

#### **Background**

Although the Bible tells stories about many individuals, their lives are woven into a much greater story about the whole People of God, from Israel in the Old Testament to the Church in the New Testament, and stretching forward to the fullness of time when all things in heaven and on earth are united in Christ (Ephesians 1.10). The message is clear: a godly life is a shared life. That's why our congregations greet people who have just been baptised with the words, "We welcome you into the fellowship of faith; we are children of the same heavenly Father..." Baptism marks our entry into the church, the Body of Christ, the household of God. When we become Christians we do not lose our individuality, but our faith and life is not a private thing: we are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12.27). And, like a material body, each part of Christ's Body, each "member", only grows together with the whole. That's why our diocesan vision statement begins, "We pray to be..."; and we hope that our diocesan Way of Life will enable us to experience a stronger sense of belonging and being transformed together.

- Is your experience of Christianity more like a shared life or a private commitment?
- To what extent do you think the life of your church or church group reflects the life of the earliest church described in Acts 2? Do you find the picture in Acts inspiring or challenging?
- Is there anything in the Commission's description of Christian life which you hadn't though of before, or which you find a particular challenge?

## Devotion

**Commission Text:** "Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?"

**Dwelling in the Word:** Colossians 2.6-7; 3.15-17 **Background** 

This first question from the "Commission" recollects the first Christian converts who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2.42 NRSV). Although talk about religious "devotions" has a slightly old-fashioned ring, it would surely be good to commit ourselves, like the earliest Christian believers, to the core elements of Christian life with devotion—that is, with love, loyalty and enthusiasm. The themes that arise under this heading are of vital importance as we seek to "nurture a confident people of God" since we know that "people grow as Christians by being drawn into patterns of prayer, worship and fellowship" (People Fully Alive: Ely 2025). Another way to say this would be that "a confident people of God is a people confident in God". Prayer, worship, fellowship and other forms of devotion help us to learn to depend on God and his gifts to us, rather than rely on our own strength. Devotion opens us up to grace and the transforming power of God's Spirit.

- What spiritual practices—prayer, worship, Holy Communion, Bible study, fellowship, etc.—do you need to sustain you? Are there things you have never tried, or have always struggled with?
- In all honesty, how much worship, prayer, Bible reading, etc. do you actually do? What might help you?
- How deep is your experience of fellowship? Is it easy and natural to talk to other Christians at the level of faith, or do you find the idea alien and uncomfortable?
- Do you think that your faith has developed much over the years, or has it stood still?

Fix a regular pattern of prayer, private and/or with others (daily, weekly, monthly...) and commit to attend Holy Communion regularly.

Arrange a study course to explore the meaning and experience of worship, especially the "breaking of bread", or to discover different styles of praying.

Make a commitment to generous giving, inspired by the example of the first believers (Acts 2.44-45).

Take part in the Diocesan Discipleship Course.

Plan new ways to increase a sense of fellowship in the church community or group, and extend a generous welcome and hospitality to others.

Agree how you might be able to share more deeply together at the level of faith.

## † Holiness

**Commission Text:** Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

**Dwelling in the Word:** Psalm 139.1-18, [19-22], 23-24 **Background** 

There is quite a lot of anxiety in the church today because of some of the challenges we face, though it also reflects a more widespread cultural unease. This can sometimes make us feel that the most important thing we should do is keep everyone happy. Of course happiness is a good thing, a blessing, but the primary call of God is to *holiness*. Repentance, the conversion of life, was at the heart of Jesus' preaching, and it is a road which every disciple must travel. It is not only individuals, though, who need to become holy: institutions do too, not least the church. What God desires is the conversion of all life, the life of the whole world, and the church is called to model the life of the Kingdom. This section of our *Way of Life* may well pose questions for individual Christians, but the focus is on our common life and "building healthy churches": To what extent are we a sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God?

- What might "conversion of life" mean for you?
- Is your goal to keep each other happy or to help each other become holy?
- What standards of corporate life (i.e. agreed common behaviour) will you adhere to so as to ensure that the character of your life together makes the Gospel visible?
- Do you (individually and/or collectively) struggle with particular temptations? Do you suffer under a weight of shame from which you need to be released? Are there broken relationships in need of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing?

### **Examples of Steps for the Journey**

Do a "spiritual MOT".

Decide how to get help to overcome any particular struggles with temptation (remembering that groups as well as individuals can be tempted into ways of being which turn against God).

Make a commitment to "spiritual accountability" - e.g. find a spiritual director/guide; agree to meet with a "discipleship buddy"; make use of the Ministry of Reconciliation / Confession.

Confirm a list of "agreed behaviours" about how church meetings should be conducted, perhaps drawing on the "Fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5.22-23) or the description of church life in Colossians 3.5-17.

Do an audit or "health check" of your church or group.

## Witness

**Commission Text:** Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

Dwelling in the Word: Matthew 5.13-16

**Background** 

This question from the "Commission" picks up the theme of Jesus' Great Commission—his parting words to the disciples in Matthew's Gospel: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28.19). Many Christians find the idea of evangelism intimidating, though many also take comfort in some advice attributed to St Frances: "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words".

Christian witness is actually quite simple, because it is just about sharing good news. This is something we do quite naturally and quite often—e.g. "Have you seen the beautiful sunset?" "Do you know that there is a 50% sale on this weekend?" "Did you hear about the free firework display tonight?"

This section of the *Way of Life* may provoke you to think about your own experience of the Gospel, or the life of the church, as "good news". You might also wonder whether people in your community would ever think of your parish church, or church group, as in any sense "good news" for them. There are links here to "nurturing a confident people of God" and our efforts to "serve the community".

- In what way is your life, or the life of your church/group, "good news" for others?
- How difficult is it for you to be open with others about your faith?
- Do you expect God to be at work in your life? Can you think of any times in your life recently which bear witness to God's goodness and grace? Have you lost sight of the fact that the good news is for you as well as for others?

### **Examples of Steps for the Journey**

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Undertake a regular "review of the day", perhaps using the Ignatian "Examen", to help you to discern God at work in your life.

Introduce a pattern of "testimony" to help people to see and bear witness to what God is doing their lives.

Run a study course on evangelism.

Commit to some activity or project which demonstrates that your faith inspires you to be "good news" for others.

Set up a Christian nurture programme to help you and others develop from believers into disciples, or join the Diocesan Discipleship Course.

## † Service

**Commission Text:** Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?

Dwelling in the Word: 1 John 4.13-21

#### **Background**

In his famous Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25.31-46) Jesus describes how he is a hidden presence in every case of need and says that we will be judged according to whether we have reached out to our neighbours in distress. Loving God and our neighbours is the fulfilment of all the commandments (Mark 12.28-31). In a very obvious sense this part of the *Way of Life* is about "serving the community", and it is wonderful when our efforts bear fruit in the lives of other people. But it is also an important element in "nurturing a confident people of God", because "people grow as Christians by having their minds, hearts and wills reshaped through service to the world" (People Fully Alive: Ely 2025).

- What might be the personal cost of loving and serving others?
- Who are your neighbours? Are there particular individuals or groups whom God might be calling you/your group to serve?
- Are there people/groups from whom you/your group feel alienated? How might you learn to see the face of Christ in them?
- What does the word "inclusive" mean to you/your group? How inclusive are you, and what could you do to reflect the all-embracing, generous and unmerited love of God?
- How do people outside your group/church know that they are welcome?
- Have you given any thought to your relationship with the whole of God's creation—the earth, wildlife, the environment, etc.?

Hold an event to explore a Christian attitude to environmental issues and formulate a church/group/personal response (e.g. using the "Shrinking the Footprint" resources).

Agree to pray regularly, privately and/or in public, for particular people or groups in need.

Conduct a community audit to help you discern where God might be asking you to love and serve your neighbours.

Connect with a local organisation or project serving people in your local area, or start one of your own.

Develop a pattern of pastoral care or visiting.

Identify a charity to support and agree a level of contribution (financial and/or practical).

## † Justice

**Commission Text:** Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society, by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking peace and justice?

**Dwelling in the Word:** Luke 4.16-21 **Background** 

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah saying, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29.7). Like many other people of peace, Christians often experience the world as a place of exile—a place which feels far from home because it values things that cannot truly satisfy people's deepest needs and behaves in ways that are damaging and destructive.

A "confident people of God" rooted in "healthy churches" will not stay silent or passive in the face of violence and inequality, but will find ways to "serve the community" by seeking peace and justice. As Desmond Tutu has said, "I am puzzled by which Bible people are reading when they suggest that religion and politics don't mix."

- To what extent does your church or group engage explicitly with politics, economics, peace and justice and the world of work? Do they feature openly in prayer? Do they feature in prayer only, not in action?
- How aware are you of local political, social and economic issues? Do you know what the most pressing concerns are for people in your area?
- Are there issues of peace and justice that you feel particularly passionate about?

### **Examples of Steps for the Journey**

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Agree to pray regularly, privately and/or in public, for issues of politics, economics, peace and justice and the world of work.

Establish a "social responsibility" or "peace and justice" group. Commit to "Fair Trade".

Offer to host a hustings event for local / national elections, or get directly involved in politics.

Invite someone with experience of local political, social or economic issues to address your church/group.

Run an invent to consider a Christian response to an issue of peace and justice with a focus on what can be done individually and locally.

Get involved with or launch a project such as a food bank, debt counselling or supporting a local school or prison.

## † Next steps...

Working through the *Way of Life* for the first time will generate lots of ideas about how to respond. This might feel a bit overwhelming, and so discouraging too. It is important to remember, therefore, that following Jesus is a lifelong journey and what matters now is discerning the next step. It may be that there is just one thing that God is calling the members of a group to do, and some things may rightly be put off for another time in the future. This is what makes the *Way of Life* more than just a course to complete once and then move on: it's something to return to again and again, and it evolves over time. So leaders need to provide an opportunity for group members to review the work they have done together and to put together the first version of their *Way of Life*.

#### **Pray**

Dwell in the Word: Psalm 25.1-10

- As you look back over the notes you have made throughout this guide are there any challenges, opportunities or commitments that strike you as most important at this stage in your walk with God? Do any make your heart sing? Ask yourself why. Do any make you want to run away? Ask yourself why. What might God be trying to tell you? Where might the Holy Spirit be leading you?
- Can you identify perhaps one thing under each of the main headings of the Way of Life which you could turn into action? Think about how you would go about it. Does it still seem possible? Remember: be specific, practical and realistic.
- Once you have your first full version of your Way of Life think about when you will review it—after 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year...? And with whom will you do your review—your church group, a prayer partner/ spiritual director/soul friend, your parish priest...?
- If you are putting together a shared Way of Life, e.g. as a PCC, will you make it a regular agenda item, or report on it to the Annual Meeting?

#### **Appendix** – A Guide to *Dwelling in the Word*

Alongside the formation of our strategy we recommended the practice of "dwelling in the word" as one way in which we might be drawn more closely together into one people by prayerful encounter with the Living Word of God through engagement with the Bible. Many people found this very helpful and it is now widely used in churches and church groups.

#### How to...

- 1. Start with a prayer—e.g. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Word to us in Jesus, and for the witness to your Word in the Bible. By the power of your Holy Spirit, open our ears to hear your Word for us this day.
- 2. Begin with one person reading the Bible passage aloud to the group (have Bibles or copies of the text available in case people want them). Allow some silence to unfold as people let the words have their impact. You may like to have a second reading, perhaps by another voice.
- 3. Next, find a person in the group you know least well (a "reasonably friendly-looking stranger"). Listen as s/he tells you what s/he heard in the passage, perhaps answering questions such as: What captured your imagination, or struck you as important, or dominated your thoughts? What surprised or puzzled you? What would you like to ask a Biblical scholar?

Listen well, because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your partner has said, not what you yourself said. Note-taking is OK.

- **4.** After 5-10 minutes of sharing in pairs return to the full group (or medium-sized groups if there are too many for a single group). Take turns to report on what has been heard.
- **5.** Then, wrestle together as a group: "What might God's word be for us today?"
- **6.** Let people know that, as your conversation on other matters continues, everyone is encouraged to bring insights from this reading to the discussion, and be ready to return to the text over again.

### HELPFUL CONTACTS

#### Diocese of Ely website

To see more of what is happening in the Diocese of Ely, including events happening near you, visit:

www.elydiocese.org

There are lots of resources and ideas you can follow-up at the Way of Life section of the Diocese of Ely's web site: www.elydiocese.org/way-of-life

#### Way of Life email

We'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback on the *Way of Life* and to know if there is anything we can do to help you as you continue going forward.

If there is anything you would like to say or share, please email us at:

lisa.tulfer@elydiocese.org

#### Acknowledgements

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Nurturing a confident people of God



