



## **Draft Outline Diocesan Strategy 2016-18**

Diocesan Synod, 28 February 2015

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- i) The Church of England is called to live out the life of Christ in every community in our nation – it is a “Church for the nation”. It is driven by a commitment to the world that God loves and calls us to serve so that all people might be saved. This vision commits us to a different way of living together and is driven by compassion for the whole of the created order. When the local church lives out its calling, it becomes the hope of the world.
- ii) But, despite the witness, service and impact of Christians and churches, we are becoming more remote from the communities we seek to love and serve. Most churches have very few people between the ages of 10 and 40. We can no longer claim to be a Church for the nation, proclaiming afresh the Good News in this generation. In fact, within a generation, we will no longer have the people or infrastructure to aspire to that calling – without, that is, urgent and meaningful change.
- iii) There are local churches, of a range of traditions and in a variety of contexts, where we are seeing spiritual and numerical growth. There are many others that have the potential to be nurtured into this position. But the parochialism of our denomination does not encourage growth to be shared – neither given away nor received – and reproduced between contexts, even though a diocese has the potential to be bigger than the sum of its parts.
- iv) The system by which resources are shared instead spreads ministry and diocesan support thinly – and often neither strategically nor evenly. Despite being based on mutual support, very little mutual accountability is embedded within the system across a Diocese. To release the energy of the whole people of God, clear expectations need to be set for clergy, parishes and schools. Diocesan support needs to be in place to empower them to meet those expectations.
- v) This diocesan strategy seeks to identify where God is giving growth in the Diocese. Focus will be given to both working with, resourcing and nurturing that growth and creating the conditions where that growth can be sown, shared and nurtured anew in the ministry of others and across other contexts. As a result, the ministry and mission of the Church will be renewed and the Good News can be proclaimed afresh across the nation in this generation.
- vi) To achieve this, selected wider areas will be identified where there is potential to augment and share resources, to foster growth and to renew mission to our wider neighbourhoods. Parishes, ministers and the DBF will covenant to work together to meet agreed expectations around mission and enhanced diocesan support will be made available to those mission areas.
- vii) These mission areas will also be the preferred context for training new ministers. This will ensure, in partnership with training institutions, a collegial, contextual, accountable and missional developmental pathway for ministers through IME Phase 1 and 2. Beyond training, clergy can be appointed to more flexible posts in these areas where they are challenged and supported and can develop for future roles and enhanced responsibility.
- viii) As a number of these areas develop, lessons will be learnt and other areas identified to benefit from this approach in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

1. During this triennium, Diocesan Synod has been invited to participate in the act of planning for the next season in the life and mission of our Diocese. At the February 2015 Diocesan Synod, Bishop Mike will share a vision of the Church that embodies the life of Christ and is a sign of God's Kingdom in our communities.
2. Vision inspires. But we also need to confront the reality of who we are, the challenges we face to live out that vision and therefore the kind of self-sacrifice that must be motivated by the vision. In this paper, Bishop Mike first outlines the challenges that we must face as a Church and, guided by the Spirit, find a way to overcome.
3. The paper then seeks to outline the path selected, drawn by the vision but informed by the nature of the challenges and our potential to meet them, identifying how, where and why our energy, commitment and focus are to be applied. This path is what is known as strategy. At the Synod, examples of what this will look like in practice will be presented.

**'THE CHALLENGE AND THE CALL'** *Rt Revd Mike Hill*

***'It's not the Church of God which has a mission, it's the God of Mission who has a Church.'***

*Dr Tim Dearbourne*

4. There is a growing feeling that the Church of England, and indeed the wider world, stand at a critical moment in history.
5. As followers of Christ who are part of a Church which has a mission to the nation, we are called to embody the life of the risen Christ in every community, sharing the Good News in the hope that we may all be transformed by the power of God the Holy Spirit.
6. When the local church lives out this calling, it becomes the hope of the world – we see true and lasting change to lives and communities.
7. The vision for the Church of England is to unite with God in His Mission and with each other to bring about the change on a national scale.
8. Geographically, we have maintained the Church of England strapline as 'a Christian presence in every community'. Local churches make a positive impact in the life of their communities and the country.
9. But the challenge to be a Church with a mission to the nation is more complex as society and communities change, and the size, strength and make-up of our churches also change.
10. 50 years ago churches largely reflected the demographics of their context; today they are markedly different. Put simply, churches have not successfully retained young people as they move into adulthood.

11. Numbers attending Church of England services have declined at an average rate of 1% per annum over recent decades. Only 1.6% of the overall population in any given week attend churches in the Diocese of Bristol. In some areas, particularly our outer estates and the inner city, this is less than 1%. The age profile of our membership is now significantly older than that of the population. As I said in my Synod address in December 2014, the harsh truth is that there is a massive cultural gap between what we do in our churches and the subcultures amongst whom we dwell.
12. We still have the infrastructure to be a Church with a mission to the nation – in many cases valued and used by individuals and communities at different times and in different circumstances. However, we can no longer claim to be a Church living out its calling to proclaim the Good News afresh in *this* generation.
13. I believe our diocese has the vision and commitment to change that, but not if we choose to ignore the reality of a fast-changing world.
14. On becoming Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby reflected that we live in a time of revolutions – economic, social, cultural and political. We must take hold of, he said, a revolution that God’s Spirit is blowing through our structures and ideas and imagination.
15. Nationally, the Church has acted on this. At February’s General Synod, a programme of renewal and reform was discussed, proposing significant changes to how we resource mission and ministry.
16. Commentators suggest we are undergoing a once in 50 year shift in how people behave, interact and belong. As a truly incarnational Church, we need to understand and engage with these changes.
17. Yes, this is a challenge, but also a great opportunity. In our communities, there is a longing for a more local and simple way of living. The local church is ideally placed to respond and contribute to this.
18. But people also expect a more personalised approach and to ‘be known’. We expect the right format, at the right time and in the right place for us. Trust is won – and lost – through the quality of an experience, not through loyalty to an institution.
19. As communities change rapidly and diversify, our understanding of them can become quickly out of date. If we are to examine whether what we do is truly rooted amongst the people to whom we minister, tailoring what we do will require insight and support, imaginative change and focused effort. It also requires a willingness to work with others so that together we might reach the diversity of our wider communities.
20. We should be hopeful about this but in truth it will require a shift in attitude and culture. Our strength is that we are part of a wider family in the Diocese and the Church of England; we do play a part in something bigger.
21. We should have the ability to harness our strengths as a missionary people and share them across wider areas. We are used to sharing financial resources through Parish Share and ministry on an *ad hoc* basis. But in truth churches are locked into a parish

focused mentality and struggle to think and act alongside each other at a more strategic level to meet the mission challenges we face.

22. For the sake of the Church and the nation we seek to reach, we can no longer afford to have this ambivalence.
23. If attendance continues on the current trajectory, adult attendance will halve in 20 years. Finances have been relatively stable through increased individual giving but 70% of this comes from those aged over 55, and 42% from those over 65.
24. Although we have seen a welcome increase in Parish Share giving in 2015, in reality parishes are giving considerably less to the wider diocese to support mission and ministry elsewhere. Levels of subsidy have become unsustainable with 60% of parishes not meeting their direct costs of ministry, subsidised to the tune of £1.8m by other parishes and the Diocese's resources. Many of these parishes are not in deprived areas. This begs the question, are we investing in growth with a bias to the poor or subsidising decline?
25. As well as ageing congregations, the age profile of our clergy is increasing. 40% of clergy are due to retire over the next decade or so. While ordination rates have held up, a seismic increase would be required to maintain current numbers – and the impact of that increase would take some years to be seen.
26. So we must change, and take prayerful, purposeful, coordinated – and urgent – action to do so.

## **A DIOCESAN STRATEGY**

27. Over the last two years, we have been discerning ways forward to form a strategy for 2016-2018.
  - We have listened to the wider Diocese's hopes and challenges through our strategy conversations in Diocesan Synod and elsewhere.
  - We have considered learning from the wider Church about what it means to be and lead a missionary church in this generation (for example the *Church Growth Research* and *Experiences of Ministry* projects).
  - We have analysed our current situation in terms of ministry, membership, finances, spiritual and numerical growth, and the demographics of our diocese, and taken due account of future projections to ensure our planning is based in reality.
  - We have fed into and kept abreast of the reforms and changes being proposed by the national Church.
  - In all this, we have sought to listen to the Holy Spirit and each other and remain true to our calling to be Church for the nation that proclaims the Good News afresh in this generation.
28. A good strategy is by its nature a way through a difficulty, a response to a challenge. The challenge that Bishop Mike outlines above therefore forms a crucial part of our strategy. A good strategy must be focused, concentrating and coordinating resources to achieve real breakthroughs in response to those challenges.

29. This Outline, therefore, does not describe all the activities and concerns of the Diocese. It does not list multiple goals. Instead, as it is a diocesan strategy, it focuses on what we have to do together and how we must use diocesan resources to overcome the challenges to fulfil our calling.

## **AN ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGE**

30. In obedience to the commission that Jesus gave his disciples the Church's vocation is to proclaim the good news afresh in each generation. As disciples of our Risen Lord we are called to be loyal to the inheritance of faith which we have received and open to God's Spirit so we can be constantly renewed and reformed for the task entrusted to us.

31. We are committed as a diocese in the Church of England, unified by the apostolic leadership of the Bishop of Bristol, to be a church with a mission to the nation in this area – embodying the life of Christ in every community, proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom to people so that they may be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

32. We have sustained the numbers of church communities across our area, ongoing worship and outreach of various expressions.

33. However, the number of Christian disciples in Church of England churches has reduced and large parts of the population are significantly under-represented in our churches. This means that our mission is both spread thinly across large communities and disconnected with significant parts of those communities.

34. Significantly, the low numbers of people between the ages of 10 and 40 who are part of our churches, and the low likelihood of growth within generations, mean that the future strength of the church is in doubt.

35. Based on current projections, in 20 years we will not have the numerical strength to support the infrastructure to be a Church with a mission to the nation and will most likely consist of a considerably smaller number of self-sustaining churches in towns and suburban areas.

36. Strengthening our witness and reaching groups from whom we are disconnected will take considerable effort, focus and time.

37. Research and experience shows that the "right leader" who combines some specific qualities and skills and an intention to grow is the critical human factor in any church's mission effectiveness. The recruitment, selection, development and placement of such leaders is also the primary strategic responsibility at diocesan level.

38. This leadership has an empowering impact on the ministry of other leaders in the church community, on church members and their discipleship. This in turn influences the congregation's willingness to change to contribute to the church's mission and evangelism. This will then express itself with growth in numbers.

39. It is normally then that further interventions like supporting relevant outreach, facilitating the creation of new worshipping communities, additional staffing and use of buildings,

make a difference in terms of sustaining that growth and breaking through size thresholds.

40. A diocesan identity, structure and the relationships it holds together provide a means of maximising and sharing resources, ministry and good practice to enhance and reproduce growth and mission.

41. Our diocesan strategy must therefore:

- ensure churches have ministerial leadership with the qualities and vision to lead a missionary church;
- ensure diocesan and deanery level resources are used, focused and coordinated in such a way that enhances the mission potential of churches across an area, including their relationships with schools and other local, regional and national partners;
- provide meaningful ways to reproduce missionary endeavour and communities across our diocese.

42. However, any strategy will need to overcome the following current constraints:

- A developmental pathway which propels clergy from an initial training experience to an exposed and isolated role as an incumbent.
- A system, reinforced by cultural expectation, that clergy are deployed individually to a parish or a group of parishes.
- A system, reinforced by cultural expectation, that spreads paid clergy thinly across parishes but historical structures and situations that mean these may be neither strategically nor evenly deployed.
- A support and 'management' structure for clergy that is very flat meaning that ministerial support, leadership development, review is also inevitably spread thinly.
- A weak accountability structure for ministers that means that a high challenge and high support environment must be self-generated.
- An absence of clear expectations or an accountability structure between parishes (for their mission outcomes) and the wider diocese (for the ministerial investment made and support offered).
- An absence of clear and direct consequences when implicit expectations about growth or investment and support are not met, with the result that the costs associated with these are not borne directly by those that are responsible (e.g. a declining church reduces its Parish Share giving while maintaining its ministry; reduced overall resources mean the wider diocese can no longer deploy resources at the optimum level in a growing parish).
- Diocesan support services that only have the capacity to engage in a generic way with parishes in a number of areas, thus spreading diocesan resources and their impact thinly.
- An undeveloped mechanism of reproducing growth outside of the parish where it has occurred, through for example church planting.

## **DIOCESAN STRATEGY 2016-2018 – CORE ELEMENTS**

*“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”* 1 Corinthians 3:6

**43. This diocesan strategy seeks to identify where God is giving growth in the diocese. Focus will be given to both working with, resourcing and nurturing that growth and creating the conditions where that growth can be sown, shared and nurtured anew in the ministry of others and across other contexts. As a result, the ministry and mission of the Church will be renewed and the Good News can be proclaimed afresh across the nation in this generation.**

To do this, we must develop:

### **44. A ministry plan that:**

- Generates, recruits and develops ministers and leaders in contexts where “good growth” is in evidence and we want to see reproduced.
- Equips ministers and leaders to be adaptable to their mission contexts and to the catholicity of the Church in which they are called to minister.
- Equips ministers to lead congregations through growth and change and develop the skills to lead different church sizes.
- Provides a ministry pipeline, enabling effective succession planning in ministerial leadership roles.
- Is clear about expectations of mission outcomes for ministers and puts in place accountability structures and relationships to safeguard their ongoing commitment to those outcomes, ways of charting progress towards those outcomes and a shared understanding of what happens when they are not met.

### **45. Area mission plans that:**

- Determine mission and outreach opportunities and needs across a wider area, assessing the demography and character of the area against the strength and character of church communities (their people, plant and financial resources) in that area and their collective ability to close the gap.
- Are clear about the requirements for change and the resources required to meet the mission and outreach opportunities and needs.
- Identify and harness the existing growth dynamic in certain parishes, partnering with them to share and reproduce that growth with other parishes to meet the opportunities and needs, including church planting.
- Provide a meaningful structure for relationships between and deployment to parishes in that area.
- Provide the primary context for a development pathway for new ministers to meet the goals and requirements of the ministry plan.
- Provide the model accountability structure for ministers within the area that meet the goals and requirements of the ministry plan.

- Provide a covenant that all parties (ministers, PCCs, DBF, Bishop's Staff) commit to.
- Are clear about the expectations of parishes that choose to commit to the area mission plan and the changes required of them to deliver them.
- Provide a rigorous prior assessment of that church's capability to undergo the change before committing to it.
- Give clear incentives to churches to commit to the plan in terms of access to diocesan support and resources to effect the changes required (e.g. mission, young people, schools partnership, finance and buildings strategy support; coordinated support service and standards; grants and loans for strategic capacity building).
- Require clear financial commitments from those involved to the wider diocese to resource these and other plans.

### **2016-2018 – TAKING OPPORTUNITIES, LEARNING, BUILDING FUTURE CAPACITY**

46. During the next triennium, we need to develop a practice base that tests and develops the effectiveness of the ministry plan, the area mission plans and the resources and relationships required to support them.
47. Areas must be identified where the leadership is in place to help develop this kind of model and lead this change (i.e. where we see this or where there are the opportunities to recruit specifically to do this).
48. Although urgent action is required, capacity to manage change at diocesan and deanery level is limited and therefore we will need to be strategic about where interventions are made in the next three to four years. We need to learn from what is effective in a few cases before extending this model of mission and ministry planning more widely.
49. At the same time, as a diocese, we need to be nurturing the growth dynamic in strategic parishes by way of the kind of recruitment, parish and ministerial support that we would provide to a wider mission area, so that by 2020 we are in a position to extend the model into new areas.
50. Clearly, further work needs to be done to develop and flesh out the model outlined above, the principles that would help us to identify the kind of growth we are seeking to identify, nurture and reproduce, the resource requirements and the financial strategy to support it.
51. However, if we are to play our part in 'planting and watering' a Church that can live out its mission to every community in the nation – not just the middle class towns and suburbs – the examples of growth we are seeing within our Church must be nurtured and shared. A diocesan structure and family can achieve this, but only if we covenant together to enter into relationships of high challenge, high support and high accountability – for the sake of the Gospel.

Bishop's Staff Team  
12 February 2015