



## Shaping our future: The next steps

As we look to the future, I am sure that the time is right to seek a renewed vision for the diocese which will enable us to re-imagine and deepen our own discipleship and witness, to increase the well-being of others and help the communities we serve to flourish. That vision needs to be shared, resourced and driven. The development of a diocesan strategy is part of discerning and developing that vision. Developing a strategy will help us to articulate our mission and vision in such a way that we can be more *intentional* in the use of our resources (human, financial, spiritual and theological). Making the best use of our resources is essential if we are to achieve our goals and realise our plans, in the light of where we believe God is leading us.

At the heart of the gospel is Jesus' call to deny ourselves, to take up his cross and to follow him. That is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. And as followers of Jesus, we are called into fellowship with all other Christians - those who have gone before and those who are part of the world-wide church today. We are baptised into the Body of Christ, part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Living out that calling means listening to Jesus' words, following in his steps and allowing him to transform our lives. Jesus gave his first disciples a great Commandment, a great Commission and a great Comfort.

- 'This is my *commandment*' he said, 'that you love one another as I have loved you. No-one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (John 15:12-13).
- His *commission* is equally clear: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'. (Matthew 28:19).
- This is incredibly daunting and it would be completely overwhelming if it were not for the promise, the *comfort* of the risen Christ to be with us for ever. 'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (Matthew 28:20).

It is with those words of Jesus in our hearts and our minds that we, as a diocese seek to live out our calling and to discern together what God is calling us to be and to become.

We are all aware of the challenges which the Church faces in regard to reducing clergy numbers, falling church membership, concerns about our buildings and the changing age profile of our congregations. In order for the diocese to flourish and grow we will need to address those challenges. This will require committed prayer, strategic thinking, concerted action and good communication. One of the problems which many organisations face - and the Church is no different in this regard - is that meetings can be dominated by operational matters, including the transaction of business and finance, and issues about policy, governance and oversight. Agendas are often too full. Meetings are often too long. Time for pastoral ministry and visiting becomes squeezed. There is little or no time for adequate reflection and discussion. The immediate overtakes the strategic, and the urgent crowds out the important. The consequence is that too little attention is paid to the significant challenges

and the glorious opportunities for mission and evangelism that the Church is facing. The result is that at times we fail to act in a strategic and purposeful way.

## **1. How will we do develop our strategy together?**

The purpose of this document is to provide an update on where we have got to and where we are going with regard to the development of a diocesan strategy. This is an iterative process. There are no 'tablets of stone' setting out a Grand Plan. We will need to continue listening, thinking, praying, dreaming, talking, planning, reviewing and working *together*.

Strategic thinking is not only about being clear about the mission which God has entrusted to us. It is also about a continuous way of being. I have been helped by the chart (Appendix 1) kindly provided by Ken Beecham of our Audit Group. It suggests there are various stages in formulating and implementing a strategy. I believe we are currently in the blue and red sectors ('determining our position' and 'developing the strategy'); and we are moving towards the orange sector ('building the plan').

We need to do this *together* in order that we become more intentional, more focused, more resolute, more deliberate, more determined and more missional in what we do. I know that some people quibble about the use of the word 'strategy' and I am happy if people wish to talk about 'shaping the future' or 'developing a plan together.' But in essence a strategy is simply a means of deploying and using resources to achieve a goal.

## **2. Where have we got to?**

Before I was appointed as Bishop of Bath and Wells the diocese produced a Statement of Needs. This identified that developing a diocesan strategy was one of the key tasks for a new bishop to do. In the Archbishop of Canterbury's formal Charge to me, Archbishop Justin reiterated that one of my main responsibilities was: 'To develop the diocesan vision and to lead its implementation across the diocese; to direct the provision of support and resources to ensure its delivery.'

Much has happened since then. I believe we have made a good start. In my first year I visited all the Deanery Synods and Chapters and travelled as widely as I could. I spent time listening to Rural Deans, Lay Chairs, parish priests, Readers, churchwardens and many other people both within and outside of the life of the Church.

Over the summer I invited a group of people to come together, to begin to dream some dreams and to shape how we might together develop, re-imagine and strengthen our life together. It was good to see that when that group presented their initial thoughts at Diocesan Synod in October people were engaged and responsive. Questions were raised, much is not yet clear, and it was recognised that this is only the beginning of a journey. Nevertheless there is a sense that the Lord is calling us to walk with him on this journey.

### 3. So what are the next steps?

The group's eight recommendations were approved by Synod without any dissent. These are attached as Appendix 2 to this document.

- 6 of the 8 recommendations have been passed back to me and to the Bishop's Staff to take forward. (These are the recommendations about: prayer, forming a strategic and operational group, appointing someone to oversee this work, developing a process and a timetable, and reviewing diocesan resources).
- Recommendation 7 (about financial resourcing and implications) has been passed to the Diocesan Secretary for further consideration.
- Recommendation 2 (about developing and delivering a strategy at the local level) is being passed to the deaneries. Deanery Synods are already working on their own mission and pastoral plans. This is in order that our parishes, schools and chaplaincies may be better supported, equipped and resourced for the mission to which they have been called. I am clear that not only should deaneries be given *permission* to develop their deanery plans, but further encouragement and guidance to do that.

My role as bishop is not to prescribe in detail what parishes or deaneries are to do. My role - and it is one that I share with the Bishop's Staff, the Bishop's Council, and the Diocesan Synod - is to ensure that all parishes, local ministry groups and deaneries have the necessary guidance, information and support to respond to the call of Christ and to develop and implement God's mission in their own context. To that end the Bishop's Staff have already met together with Rural Deans and Lay Chairs to give further consideration to the Diocesan Synod's recommendations.

### 4. What are the next stages?

- In January next year the Bishop's Staff has set time aside to meet residentially. This will provide an opportunity for substantial thinking, further work and development of priorities.
- Bishop's Staff and other key people (both lay and clergy) will spend time away (7-10 March) developing and refining this work.
- This work will come back to the Bishop's Council (3 February and 13 April) and Diocesan Synod (19 March) to be discussed and developed.
- As part of this work Deaneries will need to agree a timetable with their Archdeacon for reviewing their Deanery Plans.

I am very clear that all of our diocesan resources, people as well as finances, are there in order that together we might all respond to God's call upon our lives. All this work will have an impact on how the priorities of our diocesan budget are framed and this is a conversation that we all need to be engaged with. The staff at the Old Deanery will therefore play a vital role in these discussions as we see how best our ministry and mission can be supported and resourced.

## 5. So what might this involve?

All this will require us to think more deeply about a number of issues including what we mean by 'the Common Good', Fresh Expressions and Pioneer Ministry; what we understand by discipleship and how we develop lay ministry. We will need to give fresh consideration to

- our worship and use of our church buildings
- our ministry to families, children and young people
- our Church Schools and how we support them
- intentional evangelism
- growing vocations
- re-imagining ministry – thinking differently about **who** ministers and **how** they minister
- chaplaincies
- budget priorities
- and much more besides.

My understanding of the mission of the Church centres on proclaiming Christ, growing disciples and serving others. This has been articulated by the 3 strategic goals for the Church of England of growing the Church (spiritually and numerically), re-imagining ministry and contributing to the common good. The presentation to Diocesan Synod expressed this by referring to Jesus's words – 'they shall have life in all its fullness.' – 'life' expressed as

- a life of growth
- a life of ministry for all
- a life of responding to the needs of the world

## 6. How shall we approach this?

This is challenging for us all, for each and every parish, and for the diocesan central services that support us. But as we look to the future we can be sure of the presence and power of Jesus. In Christ we have a sure hope and a firm promise. 'Emmanuel - God is with us'.

I conclude with the prayer we used as we launched into our discussion at Diocesan Synod. Please make it your prayer too.

*Gracious God, may your Holy Spirit guide us into the future.*

*Help us, throughout the diocese, to show uninhibited reliance on your grace and power as we seek the renewal of our lives.*

*Give us courage, rigour, imagination and generosity in order that your kingdom may come and your abundant life be known by all. Amen.*

+ Peter Bath and Wells

# Appendix 1

Strategic Management  
 by Ken Beecham – member of the Diocesan Audit Group



### The eight recommendations supported by Diocesan Synod on 17 October

	Recommendation	To be implemented by...
1.	That the strategy is supported by <b>prayer</b> , with the Bishop calling the Diocese to prayer at key points within the development of the strategy.	Bishop Peter and Bishop's Staff
2.	The <b>Deanery Mission and Pastoral Groups (DMPGs)</b> of the Diocese are used as a key vehicle for developing and delivering the strategy at local level, and informing the debate across the Diocese at a wider level.	Rural Deans, Lay Chairs and DMPGs
3.	A <b>strategic and operational group</b> is formed to build on the work done by the initial group of 5. This may mean adding to the group or forming an entirely new group, and would report to Bishop's staff through the leader of the group. A Job Description for a Strategy Leader is drawn up after further consultation.	Bishop Peter and Bishop's Staff
4.	A <b>Strategy Leader</b> is appointed, who currently serves or who will serve as a member of the Bishop's staff, to drive forward and co-ordinate the strategy. A key part of this role will be to engage with, and enable local interpretations of the strategy to come to fruition (by Deanery Mission & Pastoral Groups, Archdeaconries, etc.).	Bishop Peter and Bishop's Staff
5.	The Bishop to ensure that <b>progress of the strategy is taken forward through meetings of the Bishop's staff</b> . Key sector ministers and the Bishop's advisers to be invited as appropriate when key strategic issues are discussed	Bishop Peter and Bishop's Staff
6.	A <b>review of all diocesan resources</b> to be undertaken (including finance and the Old Deanery resources), to support and work alongside the DMPGs and others in order to ensure that central resources follow need.	Bishop Peter and Bishop's Staff
7.	A <b>process and a timetable</b> to be put in place to take forward the initial strategy development incorporating review, monitoring and feedback. This will include consultation and communication. A methodology to be developed to facilitate response to the above goals and targets from the following groups: Parishes, Schools, Chaplaincies, Deaneries, Archdeaconries, Cathedral, Old Deanery & Others	Bishop Peter and Bishop's Staff
8.	That the Diocesan Secretary be asked to report to future meetings of Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod on the <b>resourcing and financial implications</b> of the developing strategy.	Nick May