

VISION AND STRATEGY DOCUMENT

Growing in God Flourishing Congregations Making a Difference

INTRODUCTION FROM BISHOP MARTIN

I am delighted to present this Vision and Strategic Plan for the Diocese which will be the road map for how we live out God's call to us for the next five years. I am grateful to the huge number of people who have contributed to this in part or in the whole – the Bishop's and Diocesan staffs, clergy and laity from across the Diocese, the Rural Deans, PCCs, and advisers from the Archbishops' Council and other Dioceses.

Much of this is not new, but represents the drawing together of proposals and plans produced in the Diocese over the last few years. The core of it is Growing in God which has been taken on board by many parishes and benefices across the Diocese and has a momentum we want to sustain. You could say Growing in God represents the "what" and this document directs us to the "how".

The form of this Vision and Strategy document is specifically for Synod members. There are a number of detailed documents and reports that lie beneath the text and which Bishop's Council will engage with; we will of course produce a short accessible form for congregations, in the Growing in God style. We will also produce a detailed implementation plan with clear delineation of responsibility and dates for completion of each task.

These plans are never complete, never fixed, but they do give us a clear direction of travel. For me the evidence that we have engaged hopefully and faithfully in this will be the reversal across the Diocese in the numerical decline in church attendance. That is certainly achievable, because many of our congregations show that it is. It is also a real challenge, because so much in our society militates against faith. But I believe in my heart that is what God longs to give the Church so that we can more clearly live and proclaim God's love revealed in Jesus Christ to everyone.

May being hopeful and faithful in our calling bring blessing to all the people of Suffolk.

Bishop Martin

1. WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN?

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is blessed with gifted and creative clergy and laity with congregations large and small engaging creatively in their communities. But we also have significant challenges, particularly with falling numbers and troubling finances. We believe God calls us and gives us what we need to respond to that call. We need a plan to channel the resources and energies we have been given to respond to God's call well, to face the challenges, and to make the difference God would have us make.

1.1. Our Diocese's Strengths

- Across the Diocese, clear belief in and experience of our loving God who actively seeks the true joy and fulfilment of all, and who is continually blessing us with gifts and opportunities
- 122 stipendiary clergy, 50 SSMs, 117 Readers, and 558 in Elder ministry
- 763 Church Wardens, 454 Treasurers, and 420 PCC secretaries, not to mention PCC members, and a host of other volunteers across the Diocese – the largest body of volunteers of any organisation in Suffolk
- More than half our worshippers belong to growing congregations
- Many of our congregations are growing
- Among dioceses nationally, we are 8th in percentage of population participating in congregations, 6th for Christmas attendance and 5th for Easter attendance
- Strong evidence of collaborative ministry in varied contexts
- Community outreach by congregations remains valued and significant across the Diocese
- Over 200 parishes using the "Growing in God" planning tool

1.2. Our Diocese's Challenges

- Numbers of people attending church have been falling nationally for many years, and in the Diocese the rate of decline is significantly greater than the national rate
- The age profile of church attenders is older than nationally, and significantly lower for those in the under 40 age groups, and again the decline is faster
- The Diocese has the lowest number of people per church of any diocese – 1,380 – which underlines the challenge of maintaining both the buildings and flourishing congregations
- 478 church buildings in 445 parishes forming 129 benefices
- Falling number stipendiary clergy nationally, and a significant decline of selfsupporting ordained clergy in the Diocese
- Chronic high six-figure operating deficit for Diocese over several years
- Small historic investment income compared with neighbouring Dioceses

1.3. Work Already Done to Build on

This *Vision and Strategy* builds on the following programmes and policies already under way in the Diocese, and seeks to draw them together so their strengths are combined:

- Growing in God
- Generous God, Generous People/ Giving in Grace
- Next 10 years
- Looking to the Future

2. OUR VISION

Growing in God Flourishing Congregations Making a Difference

God is with us, gathering us as Christ-centred communities, calling us to make Christian disciples, sending us in loving service, empowering us by the Holy Spirit.

We will centre our lives on the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist which send us to love and serve the communities and networks to which we belong.

We will seek to live in deepening awareness of 'God with us', discerning through prayer and vibrant worship how we are called to engage in God's loving involvement in the world.

We will become catalysts for change in our communities, networks, workplaces and schools, particularly Church schools, as by the gift of the Holy Spirit we seek to live more and more as citizens of God's coming kingdom.

We will discern the particular gifting of each congregation, irrespective of size or setting, and work in partnership with other congregations, denominations and people of good will to express this gifting.

We will honour and learn from one another as members of the one body of Christ, each congregation emphasising different aspects of the character of Christ.

3. GROWING IN GOD

Growing in God remains the core of this Plan, giving a focus and goals for what we seek to do and be as a Diocese. This needs to be bedded into our Diocesan structures so that all are shaped around the priorities of Growing in God.

Our vision for growth encourages individuals and congregations to become more engaged in God's loving involvement in the world. We will do this by proclaiming afresh the Good News of Jesus Christ that is rooted in our historic faith and shaped by the Five Marks of Mission defined in the Anglican Communion. We will play our distinctive part working in partnership with other denominations and people of good will in the county.

Over 200 parishes of all traditions, contexts and sizes have already engaged with Growing in God through discerning their particular vision and call and identifying specific actions. This will continue to be part of our rhythm of celebrating, reflecting, planning and implementation. This will encourage us towards sustainable long term growth in **depth, number, influence** and in growing **younger**.

We all know the truth of 1 Corinthians 3:6 – that following Paul and Apollos, we plant and water, but it is God who gives the growth. Our faithfulness comes in our planting and watering, and our praying for growth.

Growing in Depth – responding to the call of Christ we continue to deepen our desire to respond to the call of Christ in every part of our lives

We pray for and will work for

- significant sustained increases in the number of infants, children and adults coming to baptism and candidates for confirmation by 2022.
- greater confidence of existing and new congregation members in daily prayer, Bible study, undertaking a role in the church, serving in the community and being aware of God's presence in every aspect of life.
- increase in the level of average giving per electoral roll member and increase in the number of those who engage in planned giving by 5%
- Increase the number of candidates for ordination by at least 50% (in line with the national target).

Growing in Number – drawing the contacts we have into the life of God's kingdom. We will plant and water for God's growth of the numbers of those attending worship and fresh expressions and belonging to our electoral roll by 2022

We pray for and will work for

- the reversal of the fall into growth in our average weekly attendances
- the reversal of the fall in our electoral rolls
- the creation of at least 20 'fresh expressions of church'
- create appropriate Christian communities with ecumenical partners in areas of new housing
- develop and commission at least 20 pioneers and 20 evangelists

Growing in Influence – reaching beyond ourselves in our impact on the wider world. We aim to increase our engagement and service with the wider community.

We pray for and will work for

- the development of 20 new local community projects focussed on those in greatest need

- increased support for the work of our existing church schools in enabling all pupils to achieve their full potential
- a more prominent voice in challenging injustice in our county.
- developing new partnerships with chaplains serving in our county.

Growing Younger – building churches whose age ranges reflect our communities Aim: lower the average age of our congregations to match the average age of the population.

We pray for and will work for

- a significant decrease in the average age of our congregations
- a significant growth in the number of under 18s engaged in worship on Sundays, mid-week and Fresh Expressions of church
- five pilot projects that develop effective partnerships between churches and local schools including church schools to offer each child and their family the opportunity of a life enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ'.
- the development of children's and youth workers commissioning - at least 10 of each.

The implementation of these aims, including the identification of appropriate goals, will be overseen by a newly created Mission, Ministry and Public Affairs Working Group, chaired by Bishop Mike, reporting to Bishop's Council.

It will commence this work by research into

- why and how churches are growing in different contexts in our diocese and elsewhere in Britain.
- how faith is communicated in contemporary society.
- develop means by which the lessons of growth can be shared.

4. FAITH AND DISCIPLESHIP

Our calling is to Christian discipleship. Each one of us is called by God to follow Jesus, to learn to live as disciples in our diverse worshipping communities, and to proclaim our faith to others. This is the basis of everything else in our Diocese.

- 4.1. We will develop a culture where we draw people to baptism and where all the baptised recognise themselves as disciples, and learn and grow in faith through worship, fellowship and witness. We will identify and encourage discipleship practices to nurture a culture of discipleship.
- 4.2. We will support the flourishing of all our congregations of whatever size and context, so that they are genuinely welcoming, caring and safe, offer worship that forms, nurtures and strengthens disciples, and are outward looking, making a difference in our communities.
- 4.3. We recognise that Christian community is the primary expression of Christian life, where we are formed and grow together in Christ. Worship is vital to this, and so we need to ensure our worship is the best it can be in a variety of styles across the diocese. We will therefore focus resources and training on enhancing the quality of worship across the diocese.
- 4.4. We will identify, create and publicise good quality Christian learning events and programmes for discipleship, within the diocese and elsewhere, and provide the means for users to share feedback on them. We will train clergy and lay leaders as facilitators of learning, particularly for small groups.
- 4.5. We will devise models of learning and discernment groups where discipleship and vocation can be discerned and developed across the Diocese.
- 4.6. We will contribute to people growing as disciples through opportunities afforded by community engagement, overseas partnerships, chaplaincies and varied parish settings.
- 4.7. We will resource disciples to make disciples of others, strengthening the confidence of disciples to articulate their faith and offering ways in which disciples can draw others to follow Jesus.

5. VOCATION AND MINISTRY

All are called to live out discipleship in everyday life, and some are called to bear witness to Christ through particular public ministries for the sake of the Church and the world. We will develop patterns of ordained and lay ministry that are life-giving and sustainable. We will build up the numbers of those in lay and ordained ministries to provide resilient and creative ministry across the Diocese. We will develop a culture and practice of training, including discipleship, ministerial and continuing development, that is integrated and flexible.

- 5.1. We will promote different patterns of ministry across the Diocese that support the priorities of Growing in God. These alternative patterns might include focal ministers in each community; minister models; fresh expression and chaplaincy models; ministry clusters; church plants. Deaneries and benefices will be assisted in discerning appropriate models and supported in developing them.
- 5.2. We will develop a body of ordained and lay ministers who are connected, nourished and encouraged, and all models of ministerial deployment will encourage patterns of working in mutually supporting and learning teams.
- 5.3. We will monitor the effectiveness of different ministerial patterns with a focus on the outcome of Growing in God in its four dimensions and further develop those patterns which appear to be especially blessed under God.
- 5.4. We will create a vocations strategy for and ordained and licensed lay ministries that increases the number of candidates in training by more than 50% by 2020, as well as increase vocations to pioneer, evangelist and other ministries.
- 5.5. We will develop for 2017 an integrated approach to all training for candidates for commissioned, licensed and ordained ministries drawing on diocesan, regional and national resources, which is flexible in both form of training and point of licensing or ordination.
- 5.6. We will design and introduce an approach to post-ordination training and continuing ministerial development that is consistent in approach to ministerial training, working in partnership with a range of providers regionally, nationally and internationally.
- 5.7. We will develop a comprehensive programme of training opportunities for lay and ordained ministries, both diocesan and in or with other institutions, and publish and promote these across the diocese, to start this year, 2016-17

6. RELATIONSHIPS AND STRUCTURES

Relationships that enable learning, creativity and mutual support are fundamental to growth and mission. God gives us all we need to live out our calling, and we discern those gifts through our relationships. Our structures need to be fashioned to support the operation of those relationships.

- 6.1. Our faith is a relational faith, where our relationships together and individually with God and our relationships with our neighbours are interwoven. We will hold all our relationships in prayer, that they may be joyful, loving and generous.
- 6.2. We will develop partnerships and networks across the Diocese among clergy and lay ministers, among congregations and benefices, and with ecumenical partners, that facilitate mutual learning and support and encourage flourishing and growth. We will communicate examples of good practice across the diocese, as well as lessons learned from experiences that did not go so well. We will do this through face to face opportunities and electronic media.
- 6.3. We will continue to build relationships with our ecumenical partners at local and diocesan levels to facilitate working together in mission, and with partners in and beyond Suffolk with whom we can work to serve the common good.
- 6.4. We will build on the relationships between churches and schools, and work to engage with the current opportunities to serve the well-being of our communities through our church and community schools.
- 6.5. We will be attentive to the natural relationships between communities, and factors including school catchments and political units, as we continue to review the structure of benefices so that they are constructive and generative groupings. We will encourage wherever possible the creation of benefices as single parishes.
- 6.6. The diocesan structure for supporting the development of ministry and congregations will be reviewed to establish whether, for example, the existing patterns of archdeaconries and deaneries is most effective for supporting mission in congregations. We will investigate more effective structures at deanery and diocesan level to support congregations in responding to the priorities of Growing in God.
- 6.7. We will work to ensure the relationship between the Diocesan Office and the congregations, clergy and institutions of the Diocese is open and trusting, with the Diocesan Office aligned in service to the priorities of the Diocese established through this Strategic Plan.

7. RESOURCES AND BUILDINGS

The finances of the Diocese and the large number of church buildings have each been burdens to congregations and clergy. Yet they are also gifts for mission, and managed and used rightly will serve that purpose. We will continue to listen carefully, locally, regionally and nationally, to creative ways of negotiating the balance between gift and burden, opportunity and cost with our financial resources and buildings, considering innovative ways of utilising these resources for worship and mission.

- 7.1. We will align the Diocesan operation, staffing and governance around the priorities of Growing in God: number, depth, younger and influence. These four priorities should be reflected in the diocesan staff, and determine the principal business of Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod.
- 7.2. We will develop transparent financial processes, achieve a true balanced budget, eradicating the chronic high six-figure deficit, by the 2018 budget. This will be achieved by realigning the structures to serve the strategic priorities and applying rigorous scrutiny to all expenditure.
- 7.3. We will seek to produce a budget each year by the June Synod, distribute the Centenary Share allocation soon after that Synod and we will produce a rolling medium term financial plan by 2018 budget.
- 7.4. We will manage our capital resources for the furtherance of mission and establish a substantial and sustainable Mission Fund to support innovative projects in benefices, deaneries, organisations, or diocesan wide, to generate growth in any or all of depth, number, influence and younger.
- 7.5. We will develop resources and operations to help congregations flourish and grow across all four priorities of Growing in God. This should apply to congregations of 4, 40 or 400.
- 7.6. We will continue to ensure that our buildings are suited to the worship of their congregations, and where possible to new patterns of worship. They should be open for prayer and pilgrimage wherever possible. We will continue to develop our buildings for this purpose, including through the provision of heating, flexible space, kitchen and toilet facilities, exercising sensible stewardship to ensure, for example, that in multi-parish benefices decisions are made as to which church or churches should be adapted to provide these facilities.
- 7.7. Benefices and deaneries will be encouraged to consider how their church buildings can better address the needs of the communities they serve, given that much is allowed for within current legislation.
- 7.8. We have the highest number of church buildings per head of population of any diocese in the Church of England, and so need to decide how some will have higher levels of usage than others. We will encourage where appropriate the reduction of services in buildings with particularly small congregations, so that they serve as "festival churches" used for a few well publicised services each year, the occasional offices, and where possible kept open for visitors.
- 7.9. In certain cases there may not be sufficient local resources to continue the care of the church building and so we commend the principle of a Diocesan Churches Trust and further work

will be undertaken to explore the potential for a sister Trust in this diocese or for St Edmundsbury & Ipswich to join the Norwich Trust.

- 7.10. Paying the insurance premium can be experienced as a particular burden on PCCs' funds. Further work will be undertaken on the current level of insurance and what practical alternatives exist.
- 7.11. PCCs are encouraged to consider setting up a Friends' organisation for their church building.
- 7.12. We will encourage the use and development of church buildings to be taken into account in Deanery Plans. We will also consider how the development of congregations' mission might be better served through a clearer delineation between the task of pastoral reorganisation on the one hand and the care and scrutiny of the repair and development of church buildings on the other.