



TOWARDS A COMMON VISION

A gathering of the diocesan leadership community

16th-18th May 2017



Welcome to this three-day gathering. We've come together to pray for the life of our Diocese, to deepen our community and to reflect together on God's call at this time. Thank you for making time to be here.

I have invited together lay chairs and area deans, Bishop's Council and Bishop's staff, some young people, some people from minority ethnic groups and some leaders from our larger churches. There will be around 120 of us at the gathering.

We will do some of our prayer and work in small groups and in workshops and some in plenary. The full programme is in the centre pages.

We are seeking to address two questions:

- **What kind of Church are we called to be at this time?**
- **And (in the light of this), what are we therefore called to do together?**

This working document for the gathering has some provisional answers, based on the listening we have done so far.

Please pray with me that this time apart with God together will bear much fruit in the life of the Diocese and for the communities we serve.

+Steven

God of gentleness and love

Draw near to us as we draw near to you

Dwell in every heart and conversation

Fashion in us the likeness of your Son Jesus Christ

Help us to discern together all that you are calling us to be

And all that you are calling us to do.

Assist us, by your Spirit to become a more contemplative,

more compassionate and more courageous Church

For the building of your kingdom and the glory of your Son.

Amen

What kind of Church are we called to be?

A Christ-like Church

What are the marks of a Christ-like Church?

To be the Church of the Beatitudes:

Contemplative

Compassionate

Courageous

What are we therefore called to do together?

We have identified six areas of strategic priority for us as a Diocese.

To:

- 1. Make a difference in the world**
- 2. Support and grow the local church**
- 3. Establish new churches and congregations**
- 4. Serve our schools**
- 5. Invest in Milton Keynes**
- 6. Renew discipleship and ministry**

These six areas are not a description of everything the Church does. They are six areas to focus on over the next period of our life.

The six areas leave space for other priorities in parishes, benefices, deaneries and the Areas.

A CONTEMPLATIVE CHURCH

According to the gospels, Jesus often withdrew to spend time apart with God (Mark 1.35; Luke 5.16). Jesus calls the twelve disciples to be with him before they are sent out (Mark 3.14). In the great image of the vine, Jesus calls his disciples to abide in him so that God's life may bear fruit in our lives.

To be a contemplative Church means:

- To be deeply rooted in Christ as a branch in the vine, through prayer and worship, word and sacrament
- To be sustained in joy and hope in the midst of a suffering world
- To seek the continual grace and renewal of the Holy Spirit in our lives
- To value deep wisdom and offer meaning
- To take our theology seriously as dialogue with God as well as talk about God
- To live in healthy rhythms of prayer and rest and work and be fully human
- To be good news in an over active and busy world
- To offer the gift of silence, still places and moments of encounter with the living God
- To listen deeply to ourselves, to the world in which we live and to one another
- To discern God's call to us as individuals and communities
- To wrestle with God
- To surrender our doing in order to make space for stillness and dwelling, that God might be free to do and act within us.

"Contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter."

Rowan Williams



**Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.**

A COMPASSIONATE CHURCH

The compassion of Jesus is evident from beginning to end in the gospels. Jesus is deeply moved in his encounters with the sick and bereaved. His compassion shapes his priorities from beginning to end (Mark 1.41, John 11.33-35).

The Church is called to demonstrate this same compassion: to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, care for the sick and visit those in prison (Matthew 25.37). Churches are called to be communities of kindness, gentleness and love.

To be a compassionate Church means:

- To listen to the communities around us and to the wider world
- To identify especially with the lost, the least and the last
- To live out our faith as Christian disciples in acts of kindness and generosity
- To act together to serve the poor, feed the hungry and welcome the stranger
- To mourn for the suffering in the world and take that suffering seriously
- To be tender and gentle with one another, bearing one another's burdens
- To find together a radical new Christian inclusion in the church
- To provide places of hospitality and welcome for all in our church buildings
- To offer to all, in love, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- To nurture children in school communities marked by compassion
- To steward and care for the earth
- To take action for peace and for justice.

"Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life... the Church's very credibility is shown in the way she shows mercy and compassionate love... Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope."

Pope Francis



Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

A COURAGEOUS CHURCH

Jesus walks towards difficulty and suffering and takes the way of the cross. He sets his face towards Jerusalem out of love for the world (Luke 9.51; John 11.14-15). Jesus calls his disciples to follow in this way of the cross (Mark 8.34, Matthew 16.24). The Church is a community of missionary disciples, gathered and sent to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5.13-16). We are called to make a difference through courageous lives of love.

To be a courageous Church means:

- To deepen our vision of what it means to be human, of a just and peaceful world: to dare to practise hope
- To seek to live our lives to the glory of God
- To make a difference in our local communities through seeking justice and working for peace
- To seek reconciliation in the Church and in the world
- To be bold and consistent in our evangelism and witness to our Christian faith
- To bear the cost of our discipleship through the whole course of our lives
- To imagine and bring to birth new Christian communities in many different places
- To work in creative partnership with other Churches, faith communities and organisations
- To teach the Christian faith clearly and with confidence to children, young people and adults
- To invest the resources we have been given boldly for the sake of the kingdom of God not hoard them in fear
- To reshape our buildings continually for the sake of God's mission in the present and future
- To seek to reverse the decline of the Church in this generation.

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality. A chastity or honesty or mercy which yields to danger will be chaste or honest or merciful only on conditions. Pilate was merciful till it became risky.”

C.S. Lewis

1. Make a difference in the world

We commit ourselves as a Diocese to make a difference in God's world for good in every way we can, locally, nationally and globally. We will strive to do so in a way which is **contemplative**, **compassionate** and **courageous**.

To make a difference in God's world will mean:

- Renewing our worship with a horizon of God's kingdom, enabling and inspiring the mission of every disciple in the world
- Proclaiming God's kingdom of justice and peace
- Serving the communities where we live in partnership with others
- Maintaining a presence in every place alongside the poor and in both urban and rural communities
- Developing chaplaincies in schools, workplaces and more widely
- Equipping every disciple for service and witness
- Being good stewards of the earth.

Three key questions for every workshop:

- What do we see happening already which is good?
- How can we do this in a way which is **contemplative**, **compassionate** and **courageous**?
- What are the key areas for development from 2018-2025?

And other questions you may find helpful

- How can we support the local church not only to listen deeply to the needs of their local communities, but also to see where God is at work already, and join in?
- How can we best spread good practice in engaging with our local communities?
- What goals should we set as a Diocese for making a difference in the world?
- How can we best support and develop our chaplaincies and connect them to the wider life of the Diocese?

2. Support and grow the local church

We commit ourselves as a Diocese to support and grow the local church in as many places as we can throughout the Diocese of Oxford. We will strive to do so in a way which is **contemplative**, **compassionate** and **courageous**.

To support and grow the local church will mean:

- We will look to develop sustainable and growing Christian communities in parishes, benefices and deaneries
- We will cherish our diversity and value the distinctive contributions of rural, urban, suburban churches, finding different ways to measure their life
- We will aim to see 40 per cent of our benefices growing by 2025 and 40 per cent of our benefices stable by 2025
- We will encourage good evangelism and catechesis everywhere
- We will renew, extend and deepen our work with children and young people through increased investment
- We will increase investment in ministry locally.

Three key questions for every workshop:

- What do we see happening already which is good?
- How can we do this in a way which is **contemplative**, **compassionate** and **courageous**?
- What are the key areas for development from 2018-2025?

And other questions you may find helpful

- How can we encourage good, sustainable patterns of congregational growth across the Diocese?
- What are the key tools and resources we need to focus on and make available?
- How can we best encourage good evangelism and catechesis in every place?
- How can we cherish our diversity and value the rural and the urban church?
- What can the Diocese do to encourage greater investment in children and young people locally?

THE BEATITUDES

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matthew 5.1-8

Tuesday 16 May

- 11.00 Arrivals and coffee
- 12.00 Opening worship
- 13.00 Lunch
- 14.30 Plenary
Bishop Steven
- 16.00 Tea
- 16.30 Presentation of
Fresh Expressions
research
Canon George Lings
- 18.00 Evening Prayer
- 18.30 Dinner
- 19.45 Small group session
- 21.00 Free time

Wednesday 17 May

- 7.30 Morning Prayer in
small groups
- 8.00 Breakfast
- 9.15 A Contemplative
Diocese: a biblical
reflection
Bishop Steven
- 9.30 Space for quiet
prayer and
reflection
- 10.00 Coffee
- 10.30 Workshop 1
- 12.30 Midday Prayers
A Compassionate
Diocese: a biblical
reflection
Bishop Steven
- 13.00 Lunch & free time
- 15.00 Workshop 2
- 16.30 Afternoon tea
- 17.00 Small group
reflection: what
have we heard
today?
- 18.15 Evening Prayer
A courageous
Diocese: a biblical
reflection
Bishop Steven
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.00 A celebration of
vision and hope in
the Diocese
- 21.00 Free time

Thursday 18 May

- 7.30 Morning Prayer in
small groups
- 8.00 Breakfast
- 9.15 Plenary
What kind of
Diocese are we
called to be?
What are we
therefore called to
do together?
- 11.00 Coffee
- 11.30 Final Eucharist
- 13.00 Lunch and
delegates depart
- 14.00 Bishop's Council
meets for a short
business session
- 15.30 Tea for Bishop's
Council and depart

3. Establish new churches and congregations

We commit ourselves as a Diocese to establish new churches and congregations in every part of the Diocese to meet the needs of a changing and growing population. We will strive to do so in a way which is **contemplative**, **compassionate** and **courageous**.

To establish new churches and congregations will mean:

- Discovering what God is already doing and joining in, open to the creative leading of the Holy Spirit
- Giving priority to the needs of new housing areas in many areas of the Diocese and having a strategy for each
- Developing fresh expressions of church everywhere
- Establishing a new team lead by Archdeacon of Oxford working with Area teams to lead in this area of our life
- Aiming to develop at least 50 significant new communities by 2025
- Developing partnerships to do this work with deaneries, ecumenically and with our larger churches
- Making a bold and disproportionate investment in new churches and congregations.

Three key questions for every workshop:

- What do we see happening already which is good?
- How can we do this in a way which is **contemplative**, **compassionate** and **courageous**?
- What are the key areas for development from 2018-2025?

And other questions you may find helpful

- How can we help the good news and good practice about fresh expressions of church spread more widely?
- What size of disproportionate investment should we be considering?
- What skills do we need in the new team to be led by the Archdeacon of Oxford?

4. Serve our schools

We commit ourselves as a Diocese to serve all of our schools and develop our church schools as a high priority in the coming years. We will strive to do so in a way which is **contemplative, compassionate** and **courageous**.

To serve schools will mean:

- Supporting all schools and places of learning to be centres of hope and human flourishing
- Nurturing CE schools to communities of wisdom, courage and dignity
- Cherishing academic excellence and the Anglican tradition
- Extending our network of schools and continue to integrate our schools with the life of the Diocese.

Three key questions for every workshop:

- What do we see happening already which is good?
- How can we do this in a way which is **contemplative, compassionate** and **courageous**?
- What are the key areas for development from 2018-2025?

And other questions you may find helpful

- How can we encourage more widespread engagement across the Diocese with community schools?
- How can we better integrate the life of our church schools with the life of parishes and deaneries?

5. Invest in Milton Keynes

We commit ourselves as a Diocese to recognise the rapid growth of Milton Keynes as one of our key centres of population and leading cities. We will strive to do so in a way which is **contemplative, compassionate** and **courageous**.

To invest in Milton Keynes will mean:

- Giving greater recognition to Milton Keynes as a key part of the Diocese of Oxford, recognising that the city is our largest and fastest growing centre of population
- Noting that the Church in Milton Keynes is growing but currently there is lowest engagement in church life across the whole Diocese.
- Establishing some larger resource churches and many small local churches
- Continuing to work in partnership with other Churches and ecumenical structures
- Investing boldly and disproportionately in the growth and development of the Church in Milton Keynes.

Three key questions for every workshop:

- What do we see happening already which is good?
- How can we do this in a way which is **contemplative, compassionate** and **courageous**?
- What are the key areas for development from 2018-2025?

And other questions you may find helpful

- How can we invest in a way which works and honours the past and the present and is most likely to generate growth in the future?
- How can we better raise the profile and awareness of Milton Keynes as a key part of the Diocese of Oxford?

6. Renew discipleship and ministry

We commit ourselves as a Diocese to continue to renew our discipleship and ministry to support and sustain the mission of God in every place. We will strive to do so in a way which is **contemplative, compassionate** and **courageous**.

To renew discipleship and ministry will mean:

- Developing more sustainable patterns of ordained and lay ministry to avoid burnout and increase creativity
- Supporting the wellbeing of all ministers
- Developing creative models for catechesis
- Supporting new opportunities for Christian learning for all online and face to face
- Shaping our culture increasingly around the discipleship of the whole people of God
- Praying for and seeking a 50 per cent increase in vocations to lay and ordained ministry
- Developing local training to support local ministry
- Continuing to deepen our theology and reflection around discipleship and ministry.

Three key questions for every workshop:

- What do we see happening already which is good?
- How can we do this in a way which is **contemplative, compassionate** and **courageous**?
- What are the key areas for development from 2018-2025?

And other questions you may find helpful

- What are the most important things we can do to encourage a more sustainable culture of ministry and the wellbeing of our clergy and lay ministers?
- What new ministries do we need to encourage?

Church Army Research Unit – The Day of Small Things

What Church Army's Research Unit found

There are 1109 fresh expressions of Church [fxC] from 21 dioceses. This probably 2100 across the Church of England. They are begun by all traditions in the Church of England, but in varying proportions and with preferences for certain types of fxC.

In the main...

- They are small – 64% are 50 less than 50 people, and they are normally smaller than the diocesan congregation size average
- They are young – 60% are under 5 years old
- They are varied – with 14 common and different types, now compared and contrasted

Their effect

- 50,600 attend – probably 93,000 across the Church of England
- For every one person who begins one, there are now 2.6 extra people
- 38% of the attenders are under 16s – twice the average in parish churches
- They serve all kinds of social area from city centre to rural
- The leaders think that the majority (60%) of those joining are not existing church attenders, but this varies with fxC type
- 80% of the fxC are taking some steps to grow disciples, not just attract attenders
- Most are on the journey towards ecclesial maturity, but at different rates
- 88% of those started are still going

Their leaders

- Men and women are equally likely to lead an fxC but the distribution varies by fxC type
- 36% of the leaders are unrecognised 'lay-lay' people – who do just as well as full time ordained leaders

So what?

- Four times as many fxC per year are being started as compared with 10 years ago
- The patterns in London diocese are different but with care, there are things to learn from
- Though social area and meeting frequency have some effect, the greatest range of differences arises from the choice of fxC type
- Taken together nothing else, as a whole, in the Church of England has this level of missional impact and contributes to the re-imagination of Church.

This is but one of 4 linked reports. The other three cover:

- a survey of fresh expression of Church attenders by their varying church backgrounds
- a pilot study of sustaining young churches
- what the first 11 dioceses did with their research results

To obtain free PDFs, or bought hard copies, of any of these go to www.churcharmy.org/researchunit

There are also a variety of levels for people to engage with The Day of Small Things – from a two page summary, through an A5 booklet to the full 233 pp report.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and

the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

John 11.1-45

A guide for the small groups

Every member of the gathering has been assigned to a small group of around 10 people. Every small group has a designated convenor and recorder. The group venues will be available from the information desk. The small groups will meet for reflection together and for prayer. The key questions for each gathering of the groups are below.

Tuesday at 19.45

- Each group will gather and introduce themselves and their context.
- Each group is asked to reflect together on the questions
- “What have we heard today which is important for this gathering and the Diocese?”
- What questions do we have?”

Wednesday at 7.30

- Morning Prayer in small groups
- This will be led by the convenor or another member of the group.
- At the centre of Morning Prayer will be reading together the story of the raising of Lazarus which will be the theme of the biblical reflections today.

Wednesday at 17.00

- Each group will gather and reflect together on the questions:
- “What have we heard today which is important for this gathering and the Diocese?”
- Each group will be invited to write up to three insights on a large sheet of A4 paper to be displayed in the conference hall.
- Each group will also be invited to offer longer feedback through the recorder.

Thursday at 7.30

- Morning Prayer in small groups
- This will be led by the convenor or another member of the group.
- At the centre of Morning Prayer will be reading together the Beatitudes.

Thursday at 9.15

- Plenary
- The whole conference will sit in small groups to reflect together on the responses to the workshops and the conference as a whole.