

DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER

Bishop Rachel's Synod speech given on Saturday 5 November 2016

Diocesan Synod: Update on where we are at with LIFE

On Ascension Day last year we began a process together of prayer and conversation: Who is God calling us to be as a diocese over the next 5 years as we continue to join in with what God is doing in reconciling the world to himself (Colossians 1:20).

One day all will be brought to completion and God's Kingdom will be fully here.

But all this is not simply about a *future* hope. As those reconciled to God, we are called to join in with God's mission of freedom and transformation in the present - To work for the flourishing of all people and the flourishing of the whole of creation.

What does that mean for us as the Diocese together over the next 5 years?

The process of prayer and conversation has been almost as important as the outcomes – and it's important we go on living that culture of conversation both with each other and with the wider communities of which we are part.

In everything we are and do, we need to more and more inhabit a multidirectional flow of communication and relationship as we discover yet more of what it means to be 'The Diocese'... together.

So we've reached this place today through about 6000 people taking part in conversations; lots and lots of feedback (coded and collated) - and then reflected on over 48 hours in August with a small group - A facilitated time of discussion, prayer and silence.

What emerged was the overarching theme of LIFE in all its fullness, and the key themes and priorities. These were sent out to everyone in draft form in September, with opportunity for **more** feedback, and this was carried to the clergy conference at the end of September. I fully acknowledge that receiving all the feedback at a gathering of all clergy was not ideal - this is about all of us - but we had to work with the art of the possible!

The document we have before us today is the one produced following that feedback and it will now go out in its final form around Nov 18th

There will then be an amazing party on Nov 26th - deliberately beyond the church walls. 'Out' has been an important word in so much of the feedback.

A few brief comments about the vision

As I have said from the very beginning of this process, this is **not** a description of **all** our mission and ministry - and I highlighted that in the letter which was sent out to everyone with the draft vision document.

What these vision themes and priorities are intended to do is to provide a framework of where we need to focus *specific* time, energy and resources in a much more intentional way as we join in with God's work of reconciliation, healing and transformation.

In five years' time I hope that our worshipping communities will be much more at the heart of our wider communities; and that as we serve and engage with those communities, people of every age will be inspired to discover Jesus Christ for themselves.

I hope that in five years' time new and existing followers of Jesus Christ will be increasingly confident in telling their stories of faith - sharing how the gifts God has given us have been used to engage with the people and places of our daily lives.

And in all of this I hope that we will be even more connected across the Diocese, both within our worshipping communities and with new people and organisations, working together to transform lives and communities.

The priorities are unashamedly turning up the volume in certain areas. And in some areas beginning the music afresh, because there isn't yet anything on which we can turn up the volume.

A few specific points:

This is a vision for all ages. Yes there are some specifics about children, families and young people, not because they matter more than older people but because there is a gap and we need to be standing in it.

But all of these themes have major priorities for all ages and backgrounds

So, this is not just a vision just for the young...

It's also not about lots of new initiatives being imposed on you:

Yes, it will shape the Bishop's Staff Team agenda, my diary, and the Bishop's Council agenda. It will shape the focus of work in Church House, in the Mission and Ministry department etc. We are beginning to look at how we organise our structures and our governance so that we can support the vision and ensure it underpins what we are doing, why we're doing it and how we're doing it...

But all of this is about living the vision shaped by all of us through prayer and conversation and the work of the Holy Spirit...

Whether or not this vision takes shape will depend on whether or not people inhabit it in many different ways at local level. ..and of course with prayer.

Yes there will be centrally resourced and organised training, projects and programmes – which you can *choose* to tap into.

And if there's something you want to pilot in a benefice or deanery then let's see if together we can make that happen.

It is my hope and prayer that this vision framework will give you

- permission to go on doing the things that are life-giving
- try new things
- say 'no' to things

And importantly, find new ways of sharing those stories and ideas together.

No one will do everything.

For some of you, in situations where people don't want change and who don't always want to see the bigger picture, I hope this vision might support you in those difficult conversations and difficult decisions.

And please know that I do hear what people say about not being able to do new things because of heavy burdens already being carried. We are already looking at some ways which might help reduce the burden of *building* maintenance.

I also want to be quite provocative and say that in *some* places I think people actually find it easier to carry on carrying the burdens rather than do things differently. What might be needed to support you in making and actioning brave decisions?

A quick comment on leadership: This is the theme which probably has least excited people but the reality is that if we are to live this vision then we do need to focus on leadership.

Inevitably some people think the answer is always less parish share and more clergy - I actually don't believe that if we want to truly enable every baptised follower of Christ to live out their faith confidently.

How are we identifying and enabling people to lead? Are we only focusing on all the things which are connected with our worship? When it comes to leadership where are the gaps?

I'm truly not failing to understand many of the obstacles, but in many places we need to be courageous in doing leadership differently.

And finally...

All this is not going to happen all at once! Plans are being shaped for how to implement this with different people taking a lead on different things. I'm hoping that there will be some people here who are excited by a particular priority.

Ultimately how we live this vision will be shaped by what *you* choose to do at local level and how we keep that multi-directional communication and relationship going, always staying rooted and grounded in God in whom we live and move and have our being.

And because we need to start from where we are and because we want to strengthen a culture of learning from one another, we are going to spend a little bit of time today sharing some of our stories (stories not opinions!). I hope this will begin to link people up as well as enable each of us to begin to connect with the vision and how our own worshipping community is part of it.