



The Church of England
Diocese of Ely

People Fully Alive: Ely 2025

A strategy for growth

Version 4.2 21 May 2015

Message from Bishop Stephen

I am delighted to present People Fully Alive: Ely 2025 to you. This strategy document sets out an agenda for growth for our diocese. It is based on your feedback and responses to the strategy survey, and the summary report prepared by the Judge Business School.

Before I comment any more I wish, first of all, to thank you. Your insightful and prayerful responses have helped shape the strategy we are now proposing. I am so pleased that individuals, parishes and groups took the time to provide such rich and absorbing feedback. And to the children also; your imagination and creativity has given us keen insight into what the church of the future might look like through a child's eyes.

Secondly, I wish to thank the Judge Business School for collecting and analysing the data and drawing it all into an evidence-based report for us. This service, provided to the diocese for free, has enabled us to listen to all your responses and use them to shape the strategy into its present model. May I particularly commend to you the comments from children which you will find at the end of the report.

Perhaps the most striking feature to arise out of the consultation is the sense of urgency for change. Right across the diocese, the evidence indicates there is a desire to engage with, and welcome, steps towards transformation and growth.

I believe the risen, ascended Lord is calling us to a future which is both exciting and challenging. In John's account of the resurrection appearances Jesus meets the disciples back in Galilee. They had decided to return to Galilee, to where life seemed safe, familiar, even comfortable. The encounter on the beach, focused on Peter, invited all of them to travel with Jesus into the joy, excitement and hope of new life, to be fully alive. They faced a choice to remain with the familiar or to join in the adventure of faith once more.

We do not know exactly what lies ahead but, as the Judge Business School feedback suggests, we know that staying where we are is not sufficient – safe and comfortable as it is.

This strategy for growth begins to map out the future of the church in the Diocese of Ely. Together we are on a journey continuing to discern what God is calling us to be: people fully alive.

I commend it warmly and enthusiastically to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Ely". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diocesan vision

We pray to be generous and visible people of Jesus Christ.

Believing that God calls us to discover together
his transforming presence
in our lives and in every community,
in Jesus Christ we pray:

- To engage fully and courageously with the needs of our communities, locally and globally
- To grow God's church by finding disciples and nurturing leaders
- To deepen our commitment to God through word, worship and prayer.

Strategy prayer

We praise and thank you, God of the journey,
For all your gifts to us in the past.

We look to you as fellow-traveller and faithful companion on the way ahead.

Shelter and protect us from all harm and anxiety;

Give us grace to let go of all that holds us back;

And grant us courage to meet the new life you have promised us

In Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

People Fully Alive: Ely 2025

The story so far...

For the two disciples, accompanied by Jesus, the road to Emmaus was a journey towards understanding. The idea of a progressive grasp of reality and an unfolding vision will be familiar to the people and churches of the Diocese of Ely. Over the past few years we have been taking soundings, thinking and dreaming about the future shape and character of our life together. Now we are drawing the threads together into a common vision and strategy to guide us through the next ten years.

Imagining the Future helped us to see that, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, some of our expectations would never be realized: 'We had hoped that the church would continue in its current shape, but this cannot be.' Our draft strategy analysed the reasons for this, especially current challenges with respect to ministry, congregations, finance, buildings and society. Our findings coincide with the national picture: 'The Church of England's capacity to proclaim the faith afresh in each generation will be decisively eroded unless the trend towards older and smaller worshipping communities is reversed' (*Church Times*, 1 May 2015, p.5). Change is inevitable, but not beyond our power to manage and direct. As Christians, however, we do not trust only in our own power, and we do not orientate ourselves by the limit of our own horizon: 'Strategies and policies follow from our vision of God.'

Discussion of *Imagining the Future* led to the formulation of a diocesan vision: '**We pray to be generous and visible people of Jesus Christ.**' It matters that our vision begins with a 'we', which reminds us that, no matter what challenges we may face, we do not have to create our own identity or overcome an identity crisis: God has established us as the 'people of Jesus'. We belong to Christ and to one another, and nothing can take that away. It matters too that our primary and principal activity is prayer, because everything depends on the transforming presence and grace of God. No work of ours is of any use at all unless we seek to abide deeply and continuously in the divine life and love. From this flows a desire to be generous as an expression of our gratitude for all that God has done for us, which transmutes into visibility as we seek to share God's bounty with others in tangible ways.

The vision gives us a picture of the kind of church we hope to be, something to aim for. We have added further detail by committing ourselves to three imperatives: to **engage** fully and courageously with the needs of our communities, locally and globally; to **grow** God's church by finding disciples and nurturing leaders; to **deepen** our commitment to God through word, worship and prayer. In many respects these imperatives are our particular and focused way of expressing locally the range of insights into the essential character of church life contained in the Anglican Communion's 'Five Marks of Mission' and other guidance such as 'Growing Healthy Churches', 'Natural Church Development', *Mission-Shaped Church*, etc. These are part of the rich theological background to our emerging perspective, and they are all useful tools and sources of

advice and inspiration; but our three imperatives – engage, grow, deepen – help to give us a common language and focus.

The vision and imperatives express the ‘what?’ of our diocesan life – what we hope it will look like and what we want it to do. The ‘why?’ is encapsulated in our theology and values, which include things like enabling a presence in every community and offering ministry to everyone, not just to our congregations. The next question is ‘how?’ How can we get from where we are now to where we want to be in 2025? Also, how can we overcome the challenges and remove or navigate around the obstacles that lie in our path? We know how things are today, and what we hope for the future, so what steps should we take? We need a plan, a strategy.

Over the last six months the diocese has discussed a draft strategy document, measuring it against the vision and imperatives to which we are committed, and against the reality of church life as we currently experience it. The feedback has been rich and encouraging. There is a widespread appetite for change and a common view about the values that must guide our strategy and its priorities. It is impossible briefly to sum up all the contributions, though it is clear that the journey we have been on together in recent years has produced a resounding desire to cherish the past and invest in the future. The people of the diocese do want to see change, sometimes radical, but they do not want a revolution in which treasure is carelessly swept away. There is no easy way to prevent tensions arising between the claims of the past and the needs of the future, but the strategy is designed to help us make good judgements and decisions. The diocese as a whole, and its constituent churches and communities, have a rich and compelling story which must continue to be told. The vision and strategy is the start of a new chapter, not the writing of a new book, though there may yet be some unexpected twists in the tale. The Risen Christ met his disciples on the road to Emmaus, then *they* had to make a decision: should they continue as they were, do nothing, or turn back to Jerusalem, the place of risk and opportunity? Likewise, we – *all of us* – have to make momentous decisions about the next steps on our journey.

Motion to Ely Diocesan Synod on adoption of the new strategy for growth

In the light of the diocesan vision and imperatives, this Synod:

- welcomes and supports the document *People Fully Alive: Ely 2025*;
- endorses the plans and priorities set out in the strategy;
- and asks the bishop’s team, benefices, parishes and deaneries, diocesan boards and councils to engage with it wholeheartedly in all current and future planning.

What next?

The report on the consultation feedback from Judge Business School clearly indicates there is an expectation for change right across the diocese. There is a desire to re-imagine what the church could look like in Ely in 2025.

Your responses indicated that the strategy should be fully integrated with the outworking of mission and ministry in the diocese; that some current practices and processes of the church in terms of business and management should be addressed; that resources and support are needed to increase the scope and reach of our parishes; that partnership working is desired, and finally that change was urgent.

We have responded to this rich feedback and comments from individuals, parishes and groups across the diocese, and have reshaped the People Fully Alive strategy document as a strategy for growth in the Diocese of Ely.

Judge Business School has provided us with an independent and a robust evaluation based on textual analysis. Their report comprises three sections: context, opportunities, and support for action from which five key themes have emerged.

- Nurture a confident people of God
- Develop healthy churches
- Serve the community
- Re-imagine our buildings
- Target support to key areas

These levers of change indicate the priorities that have arisen out of the consultation. They set the overall direction of travel for our future work.

Now it is time to take this agenda forward and begin to identify the opportunities and challenges of the next ten years. The diocese will introduce a planned programme of activity to support an unambiguous growth strategy. This is the responsibility of all of us. It is the 'we' in our vision statement.

None of this will work without being deeply rooted in God's grace, help and blessing. The collects found at the end of each lever for change section are offered for individual and corporate prayer.

Levers of change

NURTURE a confident people of God

Ephesians 4.1-16

Paul is in prison. He is bound hand and foot but his mind is free. He recalls the times and places where through his preaching a church was founded. He writes to one of those congregations and reminds them of what Christ has done v4-10.

As he thinks of them he sees their faces, the family groups and the individuals, people born and brought up in the town, some from the countryside; many from further afield. They are a diverse group, in background, culture, experience and in the gifts God has given them. Yet all have the same purpose, *to build up the Body of Christ* so that God's people may grow together in truth and love.

At the heart of our strategy is an expectation that God is at work in our midst. Only a renewed confidence in God will free us to risk innovation, experiment and change. By 2025 we aim to "raise the spiritual temperature" of the diocese. We therefore propose to develop a diocesan "Rule of Life", setting out the core elements of a living Christian faith, which everyone will be invited to live out in their own way.

Engage

Christ's first followers were both called *and* sent: they were disciples *and* apostles (e.g. Luke.10:1-12). People grow as Christians partly by being drawn into patterns of prayer, worship and fellowship, but also by having their minds, hearts and wills reshaped through service to the world. The church has often seen service as secondary, flowing out from the supposedly more essential inner life of faith, but our strategy sets both elements side by side. As Christians we are citizens of the kingdom, in which the causes of justice and peace are inseparable from a right relationship with God. In support of this we will provide advice on community engagement, schools work, training in evangelism, sharing faith and apologetics, resources for Christians in the workplace.

Grow

Nothing we do can ever replace the need for a greater openness to the Holy Spirit, since church growth is ultimately God's work; but experience and research suggest that there are things we can do to help the church flourish. Research has shown that the majority of growing churches provide space for people to discover faith and explore life's deeper questions. We wish to see more congregations offer courses such as Pilgrim, Alpha or Christianity Explored, and provide innovative ways to encourage exploration of faith.

Deepen

Central to our strategy is ensuring that all our activities are framed by attention to God. There should not be a sharp distinction between the 'business life' and the 'prayer life' of the diocese. We want to explore patterns of prayer (such as 'Dwelling in the Word') which will support the tasks of governance, management and planning, so that the whole of diocesan life, not just individual Christians, may become more transparent to the presence and activity of God. And we want to encourage spiritual growth in traditional ways too, such as Bible study, fellowship groups, discipleship programmes, Advent and Lent courses.

At a glance:

- establish a diocesan Rule of Life
 - provide training in evangelism, the sharing of faith and Christian apologetics
 - encourage faith exploration through encounters and courses
 - develop Dwelling in the Word
 - develop whole life discipleship – not just church ministry
 - promote small discipleship groups
 - learning from and being inspired by links with the global church.
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Prayer:

O God,
our very breath, our only hope,
in every age you take pity on us
and bring forth life from death.
Visit your people
and raise your Church to new life,
that we may join with all generations
in voicing our wonder and praise,
we make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen

DEVELOP healthy churches and leaders

Acts 2.43-47

For many, the picture painted in this passage and a parallel passage at the end of Acts 4, is an inspiration. The Church is growing, indeed it is flourishing. People are coming to faith, lives are being changed, and the evidence for this is the way in which people are giving generously. They have experienced God's mercy and grace and it has touched their pockets. They meet regularly, they share things in common. These were all signs that God was at work, and the church continued to grow so rapidly that new leaders had to be found (Acts 6).

Later in Acts we see how the young church moved out of Jerusalem and new congregations were founded. Sometimes this was from necessity: the persecution in Jerusalem meant people had to move. At other times it was in response to a call from God. The book of Acts paints a picture of a dynamic, flourishing and responsive church.

The main focus of our strategy is the life of the local church (parishes, chaplaincies, religious communities, *Fresh Expressions*, etc.). Whether people are drawn together by geography or network, the quality of each manifestation of the Body of Christ will make a huge difference to the ministry and mission of the church in every place. The strategy assumes that people generally join churches that are worth joining. This is not a concession to consumerism, but a belief that we are custodians of something infinitely precious and attractive, which is best disclosed by churches that exhibit a hunger and thirst for God, expressed in deep prayer, passionate worship, rich fellowship and committed service.

By 2025 we want to help every willing local church to display these qualities in ways appropriate to their tradition and context.

Lay and ordained leadership

We aim for growth in the number of people exploring vocations to the caring professions, teaching, and the like, as well as people offering themselves for lay and ordained ministry and the Religious Life. We want to promote good and godly leadership of every kind, and to nurture the God-given gifts of all. We want to develop greater collaboration and teamwork within and between parishes. We want to refresh leadership so that both clergy and laity feel energised, empowered and liberated to grow in their ministry. Therefore we need to invest in ministerial training and development as well as define manageable roles for clergy (and others).

Structured review

The strategy aims to make structured self-evaluation, review and planning standard practice across the diocese. This would normally involve creating Mission Action Plans, and drawing on the wide variety of readily available tools, such as the 'Healthy Churches Handbook'. We foresee that vacancies will be an important time for reviews, and the resulting Parish Profiles will play a part in helping to (re-)shape church life for the future.

Fresh Expressions and traditional church

When he was Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams talked about creating a mixed economy of Church life. He recognised and advocated the need for traditional and new forms of church to flourish. As a diocese we have seen the impact that *Fresh Expressions* can have and we therefore want to see our own mixed economy developing. We want leaders to invest their time in growing traditional and developing new forms of church for all generations, particularly children and youth.

The strategy anticipates an equal number of fresh expressions and traditional forms of church by 2025. The key to this will be to develop a culture of godly risk and experimentation. To assist in that desire we hope that a number of parish teams will attend programmes such as the 'Mission-Shaped Ministry Course' or 'Leading Your Church into Growth'. The strategy also recognises that many *Fresh Expressions* will be lay-led or led by self-supporting ministers.

The diocese is open to proposals for new Bishop's Mission Orders to assist in the development and review of new forms of church. Alongside *Fresh Expressions* we also see the need to encourage various kinds of 'church plant', not just in Cambridge but across the diocese.

At a glance:

- produce a workbook to be used by parishes to review their activity in the light of the strategy
- encourage all parishes to undertake a parish and mission audit by Easter 2016
- foster vocations through additional resources
- multiply Fresh Expressions and church plants across the diocese
- support the development of congregations in new housing areas
- review the place of market towns and hub churches in the life of the diocese
- create resources to help parishes review ministry and mission before and during a vacancy
- develop lay leadership and promote alternative forms of lay leadership in parishes and deaneries
- define manageable roles for clergy and help lift the burden of administration
- establish new ways of working together in deaneries.

Prayer:

From our earliest days, O God,
you call us by name.
Make our ears attentive to your voice,
our spirits eager to respond,
that, having heard you in Jesus your anointed one,
we may draw others to be his disciples.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever.
Amen

SERVE the community

Matthew 5.13-16

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus calls those gathered around him to live distinctive lives – being salt and light in the world. In the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains what that means.

Salt not only preserves, it also draws out flavours and sweetens food. Jesus tells the gathered crowd that they, individually and collectively, are salt on earth. They are to enhance, to draw out all that is good. They are to engage in and with the world around them and make a difference. Salt is also an irritant, of course, which is a reminder of the Church's prophetic voice.

Jesus' followers are also the light of the world: a light which makes darkness retreat; a light that attracts others. Christian people are to shine brightly in the world, to help others find a way through the darkness.

Salt is not very helpful if it remains in the salt cellar. A light hidden away is pointless. We are to be involved in the world where we live and work. We are to make difference.

Serving communities for the sake of God's kingdom is a central aspiration within our vision to be 'generous and visible people of Jesus Christ', and one of our three imperatives is to engage with our communities, local and global. Communities and community engagement are central to the Church's mission and strategy.

Supporting the marginalised

There are already many examples across the diocese of churches engaging with their local community, being both salt and light. There is good collaboration with foodbanks, debt counselling and credit unions. The Mothers' Union works with prisoners and their families. Schemes such as Besom support the poorest in our society, and there are projects to help the homeless. Our strategy sees this kind of engagement as 'core' Christian activity, not an optional 'add-on'.

A great deal of good and dedicated work in the community is already being carried out by many members of our churches. This is often not recognised as part of God's mission, either by those participating or by others around them. We will work, at local and at diocesan level, to enable Christians to see the significance of what they already do, and to affirm them in this.

Working with schools

Our work with schools remains a high priority – both designated Church Schools and non-church schools. Many in our congregations are already involved as school governors and visitors, or go in to take school assemblies. We will support school governors by providing better training, so that they are able to contribute to school improvement and help to develop the distinctive Christian ethos in our Church Schools. We also recognise that some clergy and lay people would serve better as school chaplains, so will invest in support for this type of schools ministry too.

Part of our strategy for responding to new housing developments is to seek to create new Church Schools.

For a number of years the church has been very good at providing pre-school care and meeting places for parents/carers with small children. Part of our strategy is to encourage more such groups, and to complement them with relationship courses, parenting groups and the like.

Contributing to the Common Good

Churches play a vital role in fostering inclusive communities. Our strategy aims to build confidence among Christians to join in public debate and take on civic duties and political responsibilities, in order to press for a more reconciled, just and peaceful society, and a sustainable environment.

Working in partnership

In Luke 10 Jesus commends his disciples to work with men and women of peace. Our strategy proposes to work with people of peace in our culture in order to be salt and light in, and for, the world. Before looking outside the churches of our diocese, however, we will consider how our diocesan structures, practices and processes could be adapted and improved to enable local churches to cooperate and support each other.

There are already many projects working with Christians of other denominations, which the strategy will seek to encourage and strengthen, while also looking beyond the traditional ecumenical partnerships to build bonds of friendship and shared working with the new churches springing up across the diocese (eg community churches and black-majority churches). Likewise we will continue to work with a variety of Christian agencies operating in particular areas, such as Christians Against Poverty. Our concern to work with other Christians does not, of course, deflect our interest in cooperating with all those agencies and individuals who seek to contribute positively to the quality of public life.

At a glance:

- encourage community engagement and work with local and national partners
 - support the development of pre-school ministry
 - develop a network of school chaplains and promote this ministry
 - produce resources for school governors
 - assist with community reconciliation and resilience
 - develop good relationships with ecumenical partners, at parish, deanery, diocesan and international level
 - work with the marginalised and vulnerable.
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Prayer:

God our Father,
in love you sent your Son
that the world may have life:
lead us to seek him among the outcast
and to find him in those in need,
for Jesus Christ's sake.
Amen

RE-IMAGINE our buildings

Genesis 28.10-22

Jacob is on the road. Stopping for the night he sets up camp and after a while he falls asleep. God meets him in a dream.

In the morning Jacob wakes and realises that the place he chose to rest was a special place, a place where the Lord became real to him in a way that he hadn't known before. He says, 'Surely the Lord is in this place. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'.

It's a wonderful, vivid picture. Gates always lead somewhere. This gate led into the very presence of God.

Our church buildings can be gateways into God's presence. Celtic Christians talked about 'thin places' – places where heaven and earth seem very close. Many of our church buildings have this numinous quality. But, as the story of Jacob reminds us, the experience of God's nearer presence isn't limited to houses made with human hands. God is free to reveal himself to anyone, anywhere.

Our strategy recognises that church buildings continue to draw and inspire people, even those of little or no explicit religious faith. It also recognises that some of our buildings are an insupportable burden to the 'church' in the proper sense of the word – the Body of Christ. There is often a tension between the desire to maintain a building, the needs and limitations of the church community, and ambitions for wider mission and ministry. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to this dilemma; but it cannot be ignored. What we need is greater clarity about the current options and resources available to us; and perhaps we need to create some new ones.

By 2025 our church buildings must be more than monuments to our Christian heritage; they must serve the needs of the church today. We cannot afford to let them become 'toxic assets', draining the church of badly needed time, energy and resources.

Development and modernisation

Over the years church buildings have been extended, adapted, reshaped and reimagined. This process continues today with the introduction of kitchens, toilets and other facilities designed to make them suitable for contemporary use, as well as internal reordering to give greater flexibility. Projects like these are not only about opening up our buildings for greater use, they are also about maintaining them as 'thin places' – places of encounter, with one another and with the divine. Our strategy recognises the importance of helping parishes to develop and modernise their buildings, working in partnership with ecumenical friends and other community bodies.

Sustainability and changing use

The future of many of our buildings depends on finding new ways to fund maintenance and development. Our strategy is to help parishes explore new partnerships, set up 'Friends Schemes', etc., and to engage fully and robustly with national initiatives concerning the future of church buildings. We will also ask deaneries and parishes to conduct an audit of all their buildings and to adopt a planned approach to their future (taking account of facilities provided elsewhere in the community too). The audit may confirm the need to sustain some churches in their current use, and indicate ways of making this happen over the medium-to-long-term. It should also help congregations and deaneries to identify those churches whose current level and type of use is unsustainable. Some churches may become 'hubs', centres of activity and focus, surrounded by a number of 'festival churches' or 'chapels of ease', where worship and fellowship is still supported, but on a less frequent basis. It is possible that some buildings may be given over entirely to other uses, or closed, while their church communities move to other venues, such as homes, schools or village halls. This would be a last resort, of course, and needs to be managed in a careful and planned way, with local consultation – there is no diocesan 'hit list'!

New developments

Part of the Church of England's mission is to be 'a presence in every community'. The new housing developments springing up all over the diocese pose a sharp challenge to this core aim. It is unlikely that we will afford many new church buildings, so the strategy must consider other ways to maintain a 'presence' and create 'thin places'. Talking to developers and other partners will be important, as will partnership between old and new church communities. Insights and initiatives from new communities may provide inspiration for older ones too, as they consider what a sustainable future might look like.

At a glance:

- through the parish and deanery audit identify hub and festival churches
 - share resources so that buildings can be adapted to serve the needs of today's church
 - help individual congregations develop 'Friends Schemes'
 - produce advice sheets for PCCs
 - creating chapels of ease
 - closing churches
 - simplifying administrative structures in multi-parish benefices
 - work with partners to establish a Christian presence in new housing developments.
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Prayer:

Almighty God,
in the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ,
you have opened for us the gate of heaven:
may we who celebrate this hope
in your Church on earth
open our doors to all who seek you,
and welcome them into the awesome joy of your presence.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

TARGET support to key areas

Ezekiel 37.1-14

Ezekiel was one of the prophets sent by God to his people. This passage is vivid and powerful. It is often read at Pentecost to remind the Church that it is the work of God to revive us and bring new life. Christians have interpreted this passage using three timeframes.

First, there was Israel in despair, to whom the prophet brought hope of renewal. Secondly, there was the once-for-all gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when God breathed new life into fearful, hopeless disciples. Thirdly, there is the Church of today, constantly in need of strength, renewal and inspiration by the Spirit. May God breathe new life into dry bones.

Although the good news of Jesus Christ always remains the same, the church is called to proclaim it afresh in each generation. Changes in culture and context mean that the church has to adapt, lest it become a quaint irrelevance, disconnected from the wider society it is called to serve.

The strategy presupposes a diocesan ethos in which renewal and rebirth is seen as inevitable, imperative and ongoing. It also identifies some particular areas where the need for strategic change is particularly pressing.

Targeting resources

Data collection and analysis is a key strategic tool. Together with other ways of describing local situations, hard evidence concerning church finance, attendance, activities, etc., will help us to understand better how diocesan resources are being invested, and how that investment may be used more effectively. Until now, support has been handed out in a fairly haphazard way. The strategy will review this to ensure that we target money and other resources where there is greatest need and greatest opportunity. Key areas for new investment will be market towns and new housing developments, *Fresh Expressions* and pioneering forms of ministry.

“Special measures”

In many places churches will continue to flourish, but there may be times when they do not fare well. Churches with good habits of self-review will recognise their situation and ask for help. The diocese is always ready to provide systems of accountability, accompaniment and investment to help bring about positive change. Occasionally, the initiative will have to come from outside, because decline and low morale have sapped the internal resources needed to face the future. There may be difficult conversations in such circumstances, and all involved will have to behave

with maturity and tact. The term 'Special Measures' has been adopted for churches in this second category. It underlines the diocese's concern, and its commitment to providing the support needed to achieve radical change. In a very small number of cases, mutual discernment may lead to the decision that a church should close, and its people find a new home within a more robust church community.

Interim ministry

Although most clergy and lay ministers will continue to serve in a particular place over a fairly long period of time, the strategy suggests that there may be a place for deployable 'interim ministers' who can offer short-term clearly defined support and leadership, either during vacancies or to increase capacity where there is particular need. More generally, the strategy will consider how we manage periods of vacancy, work allocation, recruitment and appointments.

Deployment

An important strand in this work will be the development of a ministry deployment plan to take account of the declining number of stipendiary priests. By 2025 the number of full-time, paid clergy in our diocese is likely to reduce from a little over 100 to around 80, so we need to think carefully about where they should be and what they should do. This will have an impact on deanery plans, ministerial development reviews and role descriptions for clergy and lay ministers. The strategy will also consider how we might use paid lay workers in a supporting role to release ministers for ministry.

Financial planning

Part of the strategy is to introduce a fundamental review of what we spend (a zero-based budget) in 2016, moving into a three-year budget programme from 2017. This will enable us to spend money more intentionally and develop longer-term plans. We also aim to give greater clarity to local churches about the costs of ministry and mission, and to highlight areas of financial vulnerability.

We have to ensure that diocesan activities are sustainable (and be prepared to make tough decisions where they are not), but we also want to be ambitious, so we plan to launch an Ely 2025 Fund to support new initiatives.

At a glance:

- remodel budget process from January 2017
- establish the Ely 2025 Fund from January 2016
- support churches which are in "special measures"
- develop interim ministry, both lay and ordained

- work with congregations in a vacancy to review ministry and develop procedures for better recruitment
 - establish a deployment plan for ministry incorporating clergy and laity
 - produce advice papers on how to appoint deanery youth workers, leaders of fresh expressions, children and family workers, school chaplains and administrators.
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Prayer:

Merciful God,
teach us to be faithful in change and uncertainty,
that trusting in your word
and obeying your will
we may enter the unfailing joy of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Where do we go from here?

The synod motion at the front of this booklet asks the various bodies – individuals, councils, committee and groups – to work wholeheartedly within the strategy.

In the consultation some people said ‘just tell us what to do’ others were suspicious of a diocesan ‘take-over’. Neither reaction is appropriate.

This strategy is not about the centre telling parishes what to do, neither is it a back door to congregationalism. The theological underpinning of the strategy is the vision statement. The first word of that is ‘we’. We, the diocese in all its forms, that is individuals, PCCs, deaneries as well as diocesan bodies, are invited to work out what it means to live out the strategy.

The levers of change indicate the priorities that we need to focus on. They set the agenda and begin to identify the opportunities and challenges of the next ten years. I am aware that this is a huge challenge for us all. As we take on new ways of working, new initiatives we will also have to challenge one another to stop doing other things. We can’t do it all and, we can’t do it all at once. We will need to pace ourselves and set priorities.

From the autumn onwards we will be publishing resources to help parishes and deaneries review what they are doing. We will be inviting diocesan boards and councils to review their activity in the light of the strategy and we will be asking them to identify key priorities for the first five years. We will also be asking the Bishop’s Council to produce a three-year rolling budget starting in 2017.

The priorities we set will need to be specific, measurable and realistic. We will need to hold one another to account. It will be a new way of working. It will take time to adjust to, but I promise you it won’t be dull.

I know from the Judge Business School feedback that your expectations for the future have been raised. I do not want to let you down but I and the diocesan office cannot do this by ourselves. It is our strategy, we are in this together.

Finally may I remind you of the second word of our vision – pray. We need not only to plan and prioritise, we also need to pray. Indeed that should be at the forefront of all we do. Scripture reminds us that unless the Lord builds the house, the labourers work is in vain.

As much as anything else our strategy is a call to prayer. We pray...that we may be the people God calls us to be, fully alive in Him.

+ Stephen