

Growing in Christ

Taking the Growth Agenda Forward



Diocese of
Liverpool

Section 1 – Introduction

The Diocese of Liverpool is at a crossroads; maybe the Diocese of Liverpool is always at a crossroads. Either way we are entering a critical period where we have to tackle the threefold problem of ageing money, retiring clergy and broken buildings. We enter this period in good heart – we are once again a growing diocese with a breakeven budget – but our growth has to continue, indeed accelerate, and it has to be for a purpose. Our growth must put down deep roots into spiritual life, must enable us to serve our wider community, stay faithful to the tough areas and present a thriving church to future generations.

In March 2011 Diocesan Synod endorsed the strategy document Supporting the Bishop’s Growth Agenda. It brought together thoughts and plans as to how as a diocese we could own and respond to the central challenge of growth. The document was agreed unanimously and has formed the basis for much of what has happened over the past two and a half years.

This new document Growing in Christ aims to take forward the growth agenda over the next three years. It consolidates the work already started and incorporates some of the more recent developments around local leadership and vocations. It retains that sense of focus, that urgency that we must have to maintain if not increase momentum. Indeed, if we try to stand still it will simply result in us losing ground and, in effect, go backwards.

And the urgency remains.

We have ageing congregations. The average age of our congregations is 61, significantly higher than the population’s average age of 48. This leads to ageing money. Our churches rely heavily on giving that is concentrated within this older generation.

Our clergy are retiring. 40% will retire in the next 10 years. It takes about 8 years from the first expression of interest about ordination to licensing a priest into his or her first incumbency to replace those who are retiring. So we must act now.

Our buildings are breaking, and are breaking us. They were not built for 21st century purposes. They drain time, money and energy and distract us from mission and ministry.

If we stand still, do nothing, maintain the status

quo we are seriously running out of clergy and equally seriously running out of money. We have time – just – to turn this around, but if we want remotely to look like and be a church for the whole diocese we have to act now. All of us.

But there are things that we can do.

Some of them are pretty simple. For example, many of the clergy of the future are in our congregations now. We need to identify them, talk to them, pray for them, encourage them. And while the financial challenge is very real for us as for every diocese if every regular giver in the diocese gave just £2.50 a week more – the equivalent of a cup of coffee – across the diocese we would have another £2 million a year for mission and ministry. We all have a responsibility to stir up that sense of vocation; we all have a responsibility to make a financial difference. We have to continue to take growth seriously.

We need to continue to invest in our schools. Church schools have been a major success story in the diocese. The landscape is changing amid the promotion of academies, the development of free schools and yet another new inspection regime. We have to make sure that we are ready for those changes, able to maximise the missional and educational opportunities while not losing that core sense of what a church school should be. And we need to retain and build on the levels of excellence that is the hallmark of many of our schools.

The Church of England’s quinquennial goals set an excellent framework for all of this. They talk of the need to:

- (i) Take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England – including the growth of its capacity to serve the whole community of the country;
- (ii) Re-shape or re-imagine the Church’s ministry for the century coming, so as to make sure that there is a growing and sustainable Christian witness in every local community;
- (iii) Focus resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity.

This should be the focus of our work.

We need this sense of growth for a purpose, the need to re-think how we are as a church, the urge to make the best possible use of the resources entrusted to us, the desire to be salt and light in

our communities.

I have heard it said, more than once, 'I just want my church to be here as long as I am alive'. I don't think we can go on propping up that sort of apathy and selfishness for much longer. We must build on what we have started. Many of the core elements are already in place, although we will need an even stronger emphasis on vocations, leadership and issues around sustainability. But if we are to be able to serve the whole community then we need the people and resources to do it. That must be the priority for the coming years.

Rather than focusing on whether 'the church will see me out' we need to have a sense of building a new church for future generations - in the words of the hymn Tell Out my Soul 'for children's children and for evermore'. What church do we want to pass on to our children and grand-children?

Ask and listen.

We approach this task, this call in prayer and in humility. Our growth agenda is not and has never simply been about numbers. Equally, growth should not be confused with success. Success is not an attribute of God – vulnerability is. Growth requires an openness to our own vulnerability because it asks the challenging question: "Where is growth needed?" And, just as Jesus liked to respond by answering questions with yet more questions, we too, quickly discover that the floodgates quickly open to more searching questions such as: "Is there room for growth?" and "Do I want to grow?"

It is right that we seriously question whether we have the capacity and the desire for growth. The growth agenda isn't a management game; it is about the kingdom of God. It is about knowing, doing and being. Knowing requires understanding,

doing requires practice, being requires character.

And, of necessity, our starting point must be small and modest. The metaphors Jesus used for the life of ministry are frequently the images of the single, the small and the quiet which have effects far in excess of their appearance: salt, leaven, seed. We live in a culture that emphasizes the opposite, the big, the noisy and the boastful. We need to clear our minds of noisiness and bustle so that we can discriminate and listen.

In Mark's account of the Parable of the Sower he begins and ends with the same word: "Listen!" That is the key to understanding growth. God's word requires careful listening if we are to cultivate a healthy place in which that word of God can grow and flourish for the sake of the world. Importantly, the parable reminds that there are many challenges to our own growth in faith and that is the important starting point. Growth cannot be taken for granted and the Parable of the Sower is a realistic representation of people's response to Jesus' ministry. There were many who did not respond favourably to what he was saying; but the few who did produced remarkable fruit.

We've started, so we will finish.

Growing in Christ is about continuity, about watering seeds and tending shoots. Rather than coming up with a set of new initiatives we need to complete and consolidate what is already in train. This document seeks to lay that out. We have made significant progress over recent years. As St Paul says, 'the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ'.

+Richard Warrington
October 2013

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Phil 1: 3 – 11

Section 2 – Progress So Far

The Growth Agenda set our diocese on a course that we are looking to stay with. It appears to be taking hold. In the 2013 clergy survey:

93% of clergy said they understood the growth agenda
96% of clergy said they supported the growth agenda
90% of clergy said they understood their role in implementing the growth agenda

This shows we are building a very good base of core leadership understanding and commitment. And although it is early days it is important to take stock of what we have done so far as key to determining what we need to do next. This section seeks to provide a brief overview of what has happened numerically and what we have done in terms of actions.

The diocese in numbers (2009 – 11)

We are a growing diocese

In 2011 we were able to announce that, according to Church of England attendance figures, we are a growing diocese. This turns around 30 years of consistent numerical decline. It doesn't end the challenge but shows what can be achieved through sustained and intentional activity.

Between 2009 and 2011 average weekly attendance increased by 5.5%; adult attendance rose by 4% and children/young people by 12%. 12 out of 15 deaneries are now growing numerically.

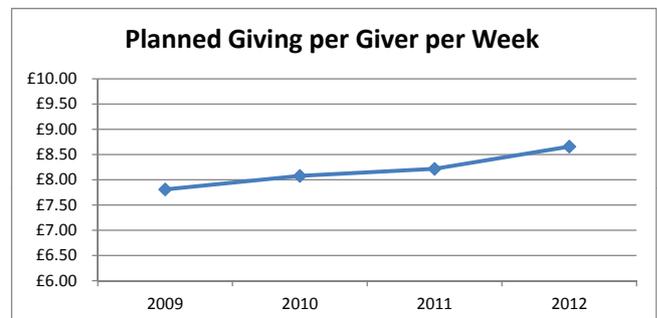
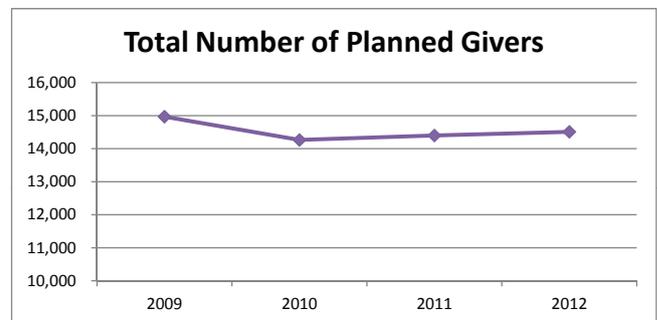
Beyond these numbers independent research by the Church Army suggests that we have 2,700 people meeting in fresh expressions of church, many of whom are not included in the church attendance numbers above. As at May 2012 we had 78 fresh expressions (38% of churches had at least one), 70% of which had started since 2006. Over half of them meet weekly; a further third monthly. They contained 1,700 adults and 1,000 children – 30% were people who no longer attended church; 40% were people who had never attended church.

Fewer people giving more

Parish finances are underpinned by the committed giving of regular givers. Between 2009 and 2011

total planned giving rose by 2.3% from £6 million to £6.13 million. However the number of planned givers fell by over 4% from 14,900 to 14,300. In other words fewer people are each giving more money (the average gift rose from £7.82 per person per week to £8.21). And what is more this is ageing money, concentrated amongst our older givers. This trend mirrors the pattern across the Church of England; we have to continue to push to grow the giving base; otherwise we will get into a vicious circle of more and more being expected of fewer and fewer.

Free reserves in parishes grew from £10.4 million in 2009 to £11.3 million in 2011. These reserves are not evenly distributed across our diocese but there is lot of money available for mission if parishes chose to use it.



An ambitious programme of work

The Supporting the Bishop's Growth Agenda document (published in 2011) listed an ambitious programme of over 50 areas for action (see pp 10 – 13 of Supporting the Bishop's Growth Agenda) under eight headings:

1. Christian disciples growing in faith, hope and number
2. Outstanding Christian leaders for today and tomorrow
3. Excellent church schools promoting Christian education
4. A vibrant and inclusive mixed economy of churches in and from all traditions
5. A sustainable base for mission and ministry
6. Revitalising our structures
7. Providing a robust information base
8. Providing a good base for ministry and home life

Inevitably over any 3 year period certain emphases change, new issues and priorities emerge and – candidly – what appeared to be good ideas at the time proved to be far less so in reality.

That said the Bishop's Core Group and staff at St James' House have worked very closely with the document, integrating its core objectives into agendas and work plans and maintaining a programme of regular review of actions. The progress can be broadly summarised as follows (the numbers after each action relate to the 8 headings above):

COMPLETED

The following have all either been completed as one-off pieces of work or have become mainstream activities which will be delivered, reviewed, updated and refreshed as part of the annual work cycle:

-
- Develop a growth planning framework – 1

 - Provide nurture course information – 1

 - Develop Communion before Confirmation resources – 1

 - Produce a diocesan profile – 2

 - Improve process to attract and appoint outstanding clergy – 2

 - Re-work Reader training – 2

 - Re-work Fresh Start – 2

 - Develop a vocations (Life Call) event – 2

 - Develop Church School Partnership Award – 3

 - Develop a process to help parishes manage vacancies – 4

 - Develop a Disability Friendly Award – 4

 - Re-build Giving in Grace – 5

 - Embed training in biblical stewardship – 5

 - Produce a parish governance pack – 6

 - Develop purposeful PCC pack – 6

 - Develop a vacancy checklist – 6

 - Publish annual church attendance figures (for the inherited church) – 7

 - Analyse and interpret trends – 7

COMPLETED CONTINUED

- Publish annual fee income – 7
- Publish annual parish dashboards – 7
- Develop deanery housing plans – 8
- Annual review of contractors – 8
- Implement vacancy management plan – 8
- Implement a boiler efficiency programme – 8
- Develop a housing security programme – 8

ONGOING

The following have all been started but have either not been completed as one-off pieces of work or yet become something that we routinely do. Work will therefore need to continue:

- Core training (welcome etc) – 1
- Develop training packages for children/families – 1
- Developing the work of the Unit – 1
- Sharing stories of growth – 1
- Developing the process of Ministerial Development Review (MDR) – 2
- Monitor and respond to educational environment – 3
- Support schools articulate Anglican ethos – 3
- Support development of Christian leadership in schools – 3
- Ensure church school buildings fit for purpose – 3
- Develop resource churches – 4
- Identify pioneer ministers in deaneries – 4
- Support development of urban fresh expressions – 4
- Reduce DBF costs through integration with the Cathedral – 5
- Revise diocesan equal opportunities policy – 6
- Ensure all forms available on-line forms – 6
- Publish annual church attendance figures (fresh expressions) – 7
- Contain cost of moving in works – 8

LITTLE OR NO PROGRESS

The following is a list where we have been unable to make significant headway generally because we have been unable to deliver the financial returns in the current market or been able to dedicate sufficient resource. We do not now plan to give significant attention to the following unless they reappear as actions in section 5:

- Create seed-cord fund to replace Mission Opportunities Fund – 4
- Generate net £500k through asset development – 5
- Create £50k asset develop fund – 5
- Increase church halls income through community use – 5
- Reducing building spend – 5

Publish annual vocations figures on a deanery by deanery basis – 7

Scope/map provision of church-based service delivery – 7

Develop a carbon reduction programme – 8

IDEAS SUBSUMED INTO WIDER ACTIONS

The following is a list of actions which have been or are being followed through as part of wider pieces of work:

Now part of the health and sustainability/Archdeacon's Review agenda

- Taking forward the Living Hopefully process – 4
 - Develop a parish health check process – 4
-

Now part of local missional leaders

- Develop a church planting and renewing culture – 1
 - Develop training for sector ministers and others – 4
-

Now part of Together Liverpool

- Monitor Big Society agenda – 7
-

DE-PRIORITISED

The following have been re-thought and are being taken forward in a different way or are no longer deemed to be strategically important:

Develop a Bishop's Certificate (in favour of the Directions course) – 2

Introduce a Shared Ministry Parish Mark (shelved due to loss of staff resource) – 2

Offer Mission Shaped Introduction course (tested but did not have sufficient impact) – 4

NEW ACTIONS/AREAS OF WORK

In a diocese as ambitious and creative as Liverpool there will always be new ideas and new opportunities. The aim of the Growth Agenda is to strike a good balance between not trying to set things absolutely in stone because they appeared plausible at the time nor chasing after every new idea or 'next big thing'. The following is a list of the core initiatives that emerged since the Growth Agenda was published. All have been endorsed by Diocesan Synod and copies of all relevant reports and papers are on the diocesan website:

Local missional leadership – see also section 4

Vocations initiative (including Life Call, Directions, St Mellitus in the North West) – see also section 4

Education Review (Building on Firm Foundations) - see also section 4

Reversing the Parish Share Payment Trend – see also section 3

Legacy initiative – see the diocesan website

Deanery Mission & Growth Funds – see also section 3

Making it Easier – see also section 4

Reclaiming bereavement ministry/new funeral fees structure

Together Liverpool

Section 3 – Money matters

The Growth Agenda identified a significant financial challenge. As we have tried to move towards sustainable diocesan and parish finances the DBF has absorbed £2 million of annual cost increases over the past decade and had a policy of using reserves to cushion parishes from the immediate effects of these changes. In practice this has meant that the DBF has incurred annual revenue deficits for over a decade.

The key financial aims identified by the Growth Agenda were:

- To establish a pattern of breakeven diocesan budgets by 2013
- To strengthen our asset base and level of diocesan and parish reserves
- To invest in key areas that support parishes and schools and facilitate the growth agenda
- To maintain strict cost control in all areas of DBF expenditure
- To increase the Parish Share collection rate

We have eliminated the budget deficit from 2013 onwards. In 2009 the budget deficit was £306,000; in 2013 it is £0.

Budgets are one thing; financial performance is another. The mere fact of writing something down does not mean that it automatically happens and there has been a consistent gap between our budget target and our actual performance.

Our financial performance has basically been governed by 3 factors:

- The level of Parish Share collection
- Our ability to manage clergy numbers
- Our ability to contain clergy housing costs

In reality there has always been a shortfall on Parish Share collection. Although it remains impressively high – over 98% – the fact that we don't collect 100% of Parish Share means that there is a cash deficit of over £100,000 on the Parish Share budget line. Similarly some deaneries are still working towards their clergy numbers targets so we have more clergy in post than are budgeted for. More positively we are now confident that we can contain clergy housing costs having introduced a new process for commissioning work.

Putting all this together over the Growth Agenda period we have seen actual deficits come down by 33% from £519k in 2009 to £350k in 2012. They are set to come down further from 2013 onwards and reach actual (rather than just budgeted) breakeven by 2015.

That said there has been something of Parish Share wobble. The collection rate fell towards a worrying 95% in 2011 – worrying because 1% of Parish Share pays for nearly two clergy posts. Since the introduction of Reversing the Payment Trend Parish Share collection has recovered well, but it remains a challenge, as does the managing down of clergy numbers to budgeted levels.

Incremental improvements 2009 – 2012

The period to 2012 represents continuous but gradual improvement to the underlying position. The main factors influencing budget progress 2009 to 2012 were as follows:

Positive factors

- A total Parish Share increase of £225k (3.5%)
- A reduction in the St James' House budget of £340k (£500k in real terms)
- An increase in investment, rental and other income of £100k a year
- A clergy housing budget increase of only £20k (a real terms reduction)

Negative factors

- A real terms reduction in national church support of £215k (a £10k cash reduction)
- An increase in the clergy remuneration budget of £520k (8%)

During this period clergy remuneration costs increased at more than twice the rate of Parish Share. Parish Share is now lower in real terms than in 2009.

Future challenges

Getting to breakeven

The June 2012 Synod agreed a new financial strategy which eliminated the budget deficit from 2013. Getting to actual breakeven will require 2 key steps:

1. Managing down clergy numbers. We still have a number of additional clergy posts above and beyond planned deanery targets. This is essentially because there are a number of clergy in parishes where a future saving has been identified but the current post-holder has yet to retire. There are also a couple of deaneries who have yet to identify where necessary savings will be made. We will need to work closely with the relevant deaneries to manage our way through this process.

2. Linking Parish Share and Deanery Mission & Growth Funds. In 2013 we introduced Mission & Growth Funds in each deanery, funded from Parish Share. As clergy numbers are managed down the Mission & Growth Funds should grow. However, the Mission & Growth Funds will take a financial hit according to the level of Parish Share underpayment in that deanery.

Capital assets – the final frontier

Over the past 3 years we have established both a breakeven revenue budget and undertaken a comprehensive review of our investment strategy to ensure that we are achieving the best possible returns from our portfolio.

The remaining piece of the financial jigsaw is to ensure that we are making the most out of our physical assets (surplus housing, redundant land, glebe etc). This requires judgement about the appropriate times and methods of disposal. Candidly we don't want to sell at the bottom of the market or sink money into speculative property developments; equally we don't want assets that could be used for mission now simply lying around dormant on some pretext of not selling the family silver or protecting against a rainy day.

It will also require careful planning and negotiation but we want to make sure that as the Charity Commission helpfully puts it we obtain a good balance between present and future needs.

Parish Share review

Parish Share is a form of mission giving in the Diocese of Liverpool, enabling us to provide mission and ministry across our diocese from the lowest income areas to the highest. It is rooted in the biblical principle of generous sharing in the body of Christ and expresses our corporate life and mutual inter-dependence. It supports parish-based ministry within the diocese.

The current Parish Share system rests on a decision in 2011 to freeze the data used in Parish Share assessments until 2015 so that parishes could plan with confidence about likely levels of Parish Share and get on with the work of mission and growth unencumbered by any concerns that increasing attendances would lead to increased Parish Share. Such a policy, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by Synod, can only last for a season. The data loses such touch with current reality that it ceases to be a position of integrity and fairness and becomes inequitable.

As such we will need to review Parish Share before 2016.

Parish Share payment trend – not yet reversed

Parish Share is and will remain the single biggest item in the DBF income budget and each parish's expenditure. There was a point in 2011 when there was a clear threat to the traditionally very high levels of Parish Share payment in the diocese. It had fallen from its normal heights of 98% + to something approaching 95%. It was serious: 1% of Parish Share = £70,000 = roughly 2 clergy posts. A non-collection rate of 5% (£350,000 a year, 10 clergy posts) was threatening the viability of the DBF spending decisions, most particularly the level of clergy deployment.

In 2011 Diocesan Synod agreed a new process to support parishes in arrears and measures to address situations where parishes were unwilling to pay Parish Share. We have seen a strong recovery in the collection rate. We will continue to implement the Reversing the Payment Trend policy with sensitivity and determination.

Over the past 3 years we have maintained a clear position that Parish Share is spent exclusively on the direct costs of ministry. We need now to lock that position in more tightly so that we ensure that clergy remuneration and housing cost increases will be funded solely through Parish Share and any additional national church support, while St James' House expenditure will be met through DBF Income from investments, rents, fees and other non Parish Share sources.

On the above basis Parish Share increases will be absolutely determined by changing levels of clergy costs.

Section 4 – What next?

One of the central themes of this document is the sense of continuity with the aims and plans of The Growth Agenda. Section 2 has already provided a list of actions which have yet to be completed and which remain an area of focus and priority.

That said we are a dynamic diocese so there will always be new ideas, new emphases and new challenges. Diocesan Synod has already debated and set a course for key areas beyond the original Growth Agenda. This section looks at some of the headline issues that we will continue to need to address over the coming years. In an important sense much of it should be unsurprising.

Because these are headline issues they are not described in huge detail. There will be many key ideas and details which are either implied or will emerge as we drill down. For example, we hope to see a flowering of lay chaplaincy in the world of work making connections - often the first connection - with people currently beyond the reach of the church. How we might promote and resource that will be a key element of the emerging vocational and local leadership agendas.

Nor does this section pretend to cover the totality of what goes on, or even the totality of what is important. For example it assumes that the vital work of safeguarding remains an overriding priority, that we must ensure that the business of the Church of England (Synods, Mission & Pastoral Committees, DAC and such like) is conducted with maximum efficiency and regard for mission and growth, that our finances are properly managed and processed, that we continue to work with and through our ecumenical partners wherever possible. It assumes a culture of rigid cost control and operational efficiency and an absolute commitment to the Making it Easier agenda. And crucially it takes as a given the idea flagged up in Bishop Richard's introduction to this document of growth for a purpose, that we are looking to grow spiritually and numerically in order to serve the wider community.

Given all of this key areas of future focus will need to include:

Local leadership

This has emerged as a very strong theme over the past 12 months and will be a key element (alongside increasing the number of vocations) of

tackling the issue of retiring clergy.

A paper was presented to and overwhelmingly endorsed by the March 2013 Synod which argued that if we are to unlock the full mission potential for the church, the community, the workplace and beyond we will need to continue to develop, release and deploy outstanding Christian leaders so that they can nurture (and, we hope, multiply) vibrant, mission-shaped communities. We will also need to broaden the base of this leadership so that we are able to reach far beyond what is currently manageable or indeed imagined.

In brief the paper argued that we would need to:

- (i) Allow a flowering of ministry - in church, in the workplace, in the community - according to missional need and individual gifting and calling.
- (ii) Ensure that all church communities have a designated and authorised person to be the focal point of leadership of that community - a Local Leader.
- (iii) Prevent stipendiary clergy from being stretched so thin that they are unable to devote/spend sufficient time to any church community to enable it to grow.
- (iv) Ensure that all church communities with Local Leaders are clearly committed to growth.
- (v) Ensure that all this takes place within an appropriate framework of support and accountability and with a clear commitment to collaborative ministry.

The paper identifies some key next steps to enable us to start down this road. The final shape of what will emerge is by no means clear so we will need to proceed in an open and accountable way as we develop our understanding and practice in this area. If we can get it right, however, the future could look and feel very different and very exciting

Vocations

There remains general agreement that if we want to take forward the Growth Agenda then we will need to achieve a step change in the numbers offering and selected for ordained ministry:

- (i) To offset the high proportion (c. 40%) of stipendiary clergy who are likely to retire over the next 10 years.

(ii) To enable flexible deployment of ordained local leaders.

A strategy has been agreed which aims to achieve 5 broad outcomes:

- (i) Significantly increasing the number of outstanding candidates for incumbent responsibility. As a diocese we want to move from being a net importer of stipendiary clergy to becoming a net exporter.
- (ii) Ensuring that future clergy are formed and trained to lead mixed economy churches into sustained spiritual and numerical growth.
- (iii) Significantly increasing the number of outstanding candidates for self-supported ministry for the church, workplace and beyond.
- (iv) Ensuring a regular supply of high quality deployable ministers able to work under the authority of stipendiary incumbents to lead individual congregations and expressions of church into sustained spiritual and numerical growth and to plant new congregations and expressions of church.
- (v) Ensuring that our clergy reflect the populations we serve. In practice this means significantly increasing the proportion (and therefore the overall number) of candidates from currently under-represented groups (under 30s, minority ethnic communities and parishes in areas of high deprivation).

We have already begun to address key elements of this strategy, and the wider challenge of whole-life discipleship, through the better resourcing of the DDO team and the development of the annual Life Call event and the new Directions course. The training context has also been transformed by the development of the All Saints Centre for Mission and Ministry and the establishment of St Mellitus in the North West; maintaining excellent relationships with each will be strategically central. For the first time we now have high quality locally available part and full-time ordination training courses plus the existing residential colleges. The combination of this threefold provision alongside our vocations strategy gives us confidence that we will see a flowering of vocation over the coming years

Health & sustainability

One of the themes that has emerged sharply over recent years is the issue of the health and

sustainability of individual churches. This is avowedly not about developing a tick box approach to church closure; rather it seeks to pick up the Living Hopefully idea around trying to discern whether there is a positive future for each church community, what shape that might be and what needs to be done to move towards that.

In many churches we are starting from a very high base of missional and financial strength; in some there is either missional or financial strength, which gives the time and space to address the areas of weakness. However, in a small minority of cases there is neither the financial nor missional strength to give any confidence of a healthy and vibrant future. In such cases there is a need for a prayerful and radical re-think. Sometimes this can simply be about dealing with a crippling building; other times it can be a more broadly based exhaustion among the faithful few that remain or a congregation detached from the communities the parish serves.

There is a strong desire on the part of Bishop Richard and the Archdeacons to invest in potential and in change capacity. This links strongly into the local leadership and vocations strategies. If we are to do this we have to have honest, robust and utterly blame-free conversations about where we are as individual church communities and, before God, what we believe he might be putting before us.

The Archdeacon's Review Meetings will be a core element of this process. Piloted in early 2013 they allow an open, honest and structured engagement about the health of the church, its joys and challenges, and what plans there are to take the growth agenda forward.

Buildings, buildings, broken buildings

The Diocese of Liverpool is hugely indebted to previous generations for their generosity of provision with regard to our church buildings. They represent sacred space and in some cases outstanding architectural significance; they stand as monuments to Christian vision and commitment; they have served as bases for mission and ministry for generations and they have a particular place in the lives of many people and communities within the diocese and beyond. Any discussion about church buildings into the future has to take due regard of this legacy.

Equally fundamental to the debate on buildings is the cost – in some cases the millstone – that church buildings have become in the diocese. They were not built with 21st century mission in mind. We routinely spend either side of £4 million each year on the occupancy, upkeep and general running of our buildings. This excludes major repairs and all the volunteer hours that are spent on building upkeep. It's a staggering figure. Apart from Parish Share building costs are the biggest single item and the biggest single variable in many churches' budgets. And for those with graveyards there are further issues around maintenance, upkeep and managing public expectations.

It's not a static picture regarding church buildings in the diocese. There are a number of examples where congregations have successfully relocated out of church buildings and thrived, just as there are also a number of examples where congregations remained in their church building and thrived. The number of relocations out of church buildings has been a steady flow of 1 – 2 each year for the past 4 – 5 years. There have been creative re-orderings which have facilitated much wider and more flexible use of space. There are good illustrations of church buildings well used by their community.

We need to open up the debate on the appropriateness of our buildings for future mission and ministry. As with health and sustainability it has to be done in a non-defensive and non-threatening way recognising the emotional attachments people within and without the worshipping community have to their building but also the realities that we face. Our partnership with Together Liverpool and the work of our Heritage Support Officer (funded by English Heritage) will be key.

Appointments and mission plans

One of the major developments recently has been the establishment of role descriptions for all new incumbencies. These role descriptions derive from and interpret the parish profile which in turn is the summary of the parish's mission plans and aspirations.

Sometimes, however, the role description essentially fills the void where a parish mission plan should be. From now on one of the disciplines needs to be that where the Archdeacons feels that there isn't a sufficiently robust mission plan that

they will delay the appointments process to allow it to be worked through.

Growing the giving base

If we are to overcome the issue of ageing money and have a financially secure and confident future we will need to continue to grow our giving base. For most churches the income received from the regular planned giving of the congregation is and will remain their lifeblood.

There are a number of issues within our planned giving. As noted earlier there has been a welcome increase in giving by planned givers but that number is declining. We know that the giving in churches is skewed with a small number giving a disproportionately large amount of the total income. Negatively this means that churches depend on a few big givers; positively it means that there are many who could give more.

We know also that the age profile of many of our churches means that we are heavily dependent on an ageing giving population. Within this while some members of our congregations give generously and sacrificially many still do not. Our research indicates that most of our regular givers give £4.50 a week or less (indeed over 10% of our tax efficient givers give £1 a week or less). For some this is a significant and sacrificial amount; for many, when set against their other expenditure, it is not. Furthermore it takes a long time in discipleship terms to move from initial Christian commitment to mature Christian giving.

All this means that we will continue to need to give stewardship a very high priority, both in terms of seeking to increase the number of regular givers and the amounts that each give. And the numbers are significant. If we could persuade all the regular givers in the diocese each to give just £2.50 per week extra we would have, after reclaiming Gift Aid, well over £2 million a year for mission and ministry.

Academies and standards

The issue of under-performing schools has long been at the centre of political debate and government attention. Setting aside the debate about the basis of what constitutes high standards and/or under-performance it is clear that reputationally and practically our record of developing and maintaining high standards on our schools has been a feature of diocesan schools.

Nearly 85% of our schools are currently rated good or outstanding by Ofsted and SIAMS, significantly above the national average. We would like to set an ambitious challenge to increase this to 90%.

Alongside this it is clear that central to the current government's school improvement plans is the development of academies. There are essentially two routes to becoming an academy:

Voluntary – whether by a requested change of status for an existing school or by the establishment of one of the new status free schools.

Compulsory – basically under the direction of the Secretary of State and based on an assessment of performance.

As a diocese we haven't forced an academies agenda. We have taken a fairly pragmatic approach on a case by case basis. However, a key strategic concern remains about how to keep academies in the family of the diocese as structurally they are independent of the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE). We will seek to ensure that our plans for developing a multi-academy trust will enable us to ensure that any Church of England school that becomes an academy will remain under the auspices of the DBE.

Making it easier

Being part of the Church of England is a huge privilege as we stand on the shoulders of the giants of previous generations. However it can also be unbelievably complicated with processes and administrative demands grinding us down and getting in the way. There is also an apparently never-ending stream of government legislation.

We can't simply ignore existing rules and procedures – many of them are about good order anyway. However we can be vigilant about making things as easy as possible for ourselves by consciously reducing the administrative load as much as we can, by making processes as smooth and efficient as possible and by ensuring that we only insist on what is required rather than what may be desirable. Equally, we cannot change legislation but we may well be able to make it easier to understand.

In addition to all of this there is a real challenge as to how parishes can access good advice and support as they seek to respond to the multiple needs in their community, especially at a time of economic difficulty.

The Making it Easier agenda will be a particular emphasis for the staff at St James House.

Section 5 – Actions

This section lists the key actions which emerge from the challenges in this document. The various actions and pieces of work should not be seen in isolation from each other.

As it says in the previous section this should not be seen as a summary of all that is going on in the diocese. It assumes that much good work is already in place and will continue. This section focuses on what else needs to be done and what needs to be revised and/or refreshed.

IT ASSUMES THAT WE STILL WANT TO SEE:

A growing numerical base

A growing leadership base

A growing giving base

A growing educational (schools) base

Sustainable diocesan and parish finances

Actions

– full implementation of what has already started

We need to take the following next steps on core areas. These are all areas of work which were initiated either in the Growth Agenda or subsequently by Diocesan Synod: **Growth Planning Framework** - establishing a clear 2-year cycle of planning, implementing, reflecting and re-prioritising

Parish dashboards - ensuring easy engagement each year with core financial and attendance data

Ministerial Development Review (MDR) - helping address issue of clergy well-being by ensuring maximum MDR up-take and ensuring that MDR creates a clear sense of priority and role boundary for clergy

Life Call - establishing an annual programme of vocational information, opportunity and challenge

Directions - establishing a clear process whereby participants can follow through on their emerging vocation after the end of the course

Missional Leaders' Community - establish a series of networks capable of supporting and resourcing the local leadership strategy

Schools standards - embed the work of the School Standards Committee

Reversing the Parish Share Payment Trend – consolidating the process of Parish Share Payments Plan for parishes in payment arrears

Giving in Grace - supporting the 3-year cycle of major giving initiative, annual review and nurture of stewardship understanding

Legacy strategy - giving parishes easy to implement tools and processes to generate significant income from legacies

Strategic development reserve - generating a £500,000 mission development fund through asset development

Policy developments

- clarity and delivery in key areas

We need to ensure that we can complete the current review process and fully implement policies in the following areas:

Local leadership - clarifying the processes and then fully implementing the strategy agreed by Diocesan Synod in March 2013

Vocations strategy - implementing the vocations strategy agreed by the Bishop's Core Group in 2012

Vacancy process - implementing the new vacancy process after the 2012/13 review

Interim ministry - creating a process to allow a creative injection of short-term resources to help/support parishes in vacancy and/or in need of turnaround

End of Curacy Assessment – ensuring that we have a robust process to ensure that each curate is able to be clearly assessed against national church and diocesan criteria

Ministerial Development Review (MDR) – implementing the agreed actions from the 2013/14 review

Reclaiming bereavement ministry – establishing a clear strategy and structure to enable us to reverse the decline in church-based funerals and reclaim a key pastoral ministry

Academies - ensuring we have the appropriate structures and decision-making processes to engage confidently in the academies debate

Awards - ensuring that awards such as the Child Friendly Church Award, Church & School Partnership Award and Disability Friendly Church Award remain helpful and relevant

Making it Easier - ensuring that St James' House is clearly geared to making everything as accessible and straightforward as possible for parishes, including cutting out all unnecessary administration and bureaucracy

Health and sustainability - establishing a basis to assess the health and viability of parishes

Archdeacon's Review - consolidating a process for a 2-year cycle of Archdeacons' review meetings with parishes

Deanery mission & growth funds - enabling deaneries to make good use of available funds for mission and ministry development

Buildings - establishing clear strategies to reduce the £4+ million annual spend on church buildings

Deanery housing reports - ensuring that we have clarity about the housing stock that we need for future mission and those that can be sold and/or re-developed

Capital assets - ensuring that we obtain the best possible return from surplus property, redundant land and glebe; this also necessitates the creation of a £50,000 asset development fund

Parish Share - reviewing Parish Share in time for refreshment/revision in 2016

Learning

– equipping people at key points in leadership development

We need to ensure that we invest in our current and future leadership through high quality and relevant training and learning on the following:

PIME (Post Initial Ministerial Education) – ensuring curates are fully prepared to lead churches into growth

Reader PIME – ensuring Readers are fully prepared for missional leadership

Fresh Start – maximising mission opportunities at key moments of transition

School of Leadership – the challenge of sustained growth and re-imagined leadership

Section 6 – Monitoring Progress

One of our key successes over the past 3 years has been the development of robust statistical information at parish and diocesan level. This was to help ensure that the decisions we make at parish, deanery and diocesan level are based on evidence rather than intuition or anecdote and that we identify what is working well, what we can build upon and develop and what may need to be challenged and changed.

While clearly needing to guard against information overload or data for the sake of it there are some areas where we could usefully enhance what we know. We will need to explore how best to capture helpful and relevant data about our connections within and impact on the community. And there must be the absolute presumption that any data collected from parishes is then given back to them in an accessible, user-friendly format.

SECTION 5 STATES THAT WE STILL WANT TO SEE THE FOLLOWING:

- A growing numerical base
- A growing leadership base
- A growing giving base
- A growing educational base
- Sustainable diocesan and parish finances

Data will be published at 2 levels – annual diocesan-wide data and bespoke parish dashboards, as follows:

Diocesan information

All information to be published as a single diocesan total and on a deanery by deanery basis:

A growing giving base

- Number of planned givers
- Level of planned giving per person per week

▶ Aim to see an increase in both the overall giving total and number of planned givers

A growing leadership base

- Number of ordinands
- Age profile and proportion of stipendiary/self-supporting
- Number of readers
- Number of local leaders
- Numbers involved in the missional leaders community
- Numbers on the Directions course

▶ Aim to see an increase in numbers and a re-emergence of younger vocations

A growing numerical base

- Average weekly attendance (AWA) - adults and children
- Average age of adult AWA
- Number of people involved in fresh expressions – adults and children

▶ Aim to see an increase in numbers and reduction in the average age of adult AWA

A growing educational base

- Proportion of children education in C of E schools
- Percentage of category 1 and 2 (outstanding and good) schools

▶ **Aim to see an increase in the proportion of children educated in church schools and movement towards the 90% target for good/outstanding schools**

Sustainable finances

DBF

- Performance against breakeven budgets
- Parish Share collection rate
- Income from parochial fees
- Available housing for sale and reinvestment
- Investment levels/returns
- Size of Mission Opportunities Fund
- Performance against reserves target (minimum of 4 months free reserves)

Parishes

- Parish Share as a proportion of planned giving
- Building costs
- Legacy income
- Level of free reserves

Parish dashboards

We will continue to consolidate core information into bespoke dashboards for each parish

Conclusion

Our Growth Agenda is not and has never simply been about numbers. We base it on the core assumption that if our congregations decline and our giving base continues to shrink (as they had done fairly relentlessly over the past 30 years) then so does our capacity to serve the wider community and our ability to plan for the future with any confidence. As a church we are then faced with the stark prospect of ageing money – the committed givers who underpin the life and ministry of each church are generally older rather than younger and are reducing in number faster than they are being replaced.

Everything in this document flows from a basic understanding that we all have a God-given vocation of service and witness. This reaches deep into our hearts and lives, deep into the church and deep into the community. It is rooted in prayer and nurtured in scriptural understanding.

We want and need to respond to God's call and discern where missional opportunities and openings lie, how we best release people to use their gifts in service and ministry and how we live and grow both as disciples and disciple makers.

Our Growth Agenda has to be about numbers but it is much more than that. Fundamentally it is about us growing in Christ in whom all things are possible.