



Diocese of
Peterborough

Moving forward with hope

A report on the Diocesan Strategy 2005-2010

*Presented to Bishop Donald
and the Diocesan Synod
24 April 2010*



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Symbols and abbreviations



Factual or statistical information



Quote from a person or parish representative, or other source



Fuller response about church life or concerns

AAE	Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry (with year)
RG	Review Group
BC	Response from Bishop's Council group
LM	Response at a Lent Meeting



Diocese of Peterborough
Diocesan Office
The Palace
Peterborough PE1Y 1YB

01733 887000

Email:
communications@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

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Introduction

At a Diocesan Synod meeting in autumn 2004, the late Bishop Ian inaugurated a five-year diocesan strategy. Following a year of preparation, from 2006 one of its four main themes provided the focus for each year, in the context of the whole. The fifth year, 2010, was set aside for reflection.

This report is part of that ongoing reflection. It has been compiled from four sources of feedback.

The **Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry** for 2008 and 2009 (reflecting the previous years) were extensively analysed.

Some **Review Groups** were set up under the guidance of Bob Purser (ecumenical officer for new communities), who brought to them his previous experience in research.

Bishop's Council reflected on the strategy at its meeting in January 2010 and small groups fed comments back.

The **2010 Lent Meetings**, held in deaneries, gave parishes the opportunity for extensive feedback using simple questions.

This report is based on an analysis of all these. A complete list of all who took part is on the back page.

Painting, not photograph

The result is more of an impressionist painting than a photograph. It has not been possible—due to lack of resources rather than lack of desire—to conduct an in-depth survey of the kind which contributed to the strategy in the first place.

However, that does not make it any less true or useful. The recurring themes and the honest remarks are sufficiently wide-ranging to suggest that nothing of major significance has been missed. None the less, it needs to be interpreted with care.

Much of the statistical information

is only a rough guide because the sample cannot be guaranteed to be wholly representative. And the comments quoted, especially from the Lent meeting returns, may not represent the considered view of a parish or benefice to which they are credited, only of those members who attended the meetings. However, they do represent legitimate opinions usually shared by others.

Bias to the critical

The research method was deliberately broad and open-ended. While the Review Groups were asked to comment on specific parts of the "small print" of the strategy, the Lent meetings were asked broad, not specific, questions. The Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry, while more specific, are limited in scope. Despite this, a number of topics recur without prompting, suggesting important areas of progress or concern that are fairly typical in the diocese as a whole.

Where possible in this report, similar if not identical responses have been grouped together. It is part of a listening exercise, and it attempts to be even-handed with, if anything, a bias to the criticisms and negatives. We cannot move forward with hope if we do not face seriously the issues which in some places at least hinder progress, drain energy and sap confidence.

Yet the overall tone remains positive and encouraging. People who attended the Lent meetings frequently came away pleasantly surprised at just how much imaginative and enterprising activity was going on, often nearby but previously unnoticed.

There is much to celebrate and build on, and much to address and improve. That is the task of Bishop Donald and the elected members of Diocesan Synod. What happens next is partly in their hands. But ultimately, of course, what happens next is in God's hands, who calls us to be faithful disciples in his world as he leads us forward.

Background to the strategy

Not long after he had moved to Peterborough Diocese, the late Bishop Ian launched a strategy called *Our Common Task* (1997). It had three main challenges:

- **Parishes renewed in ministry and mission:** each was asked to draw up a mission statement, develop the gifts of its members, and to aim for members to give 5% of their income to the church.
- **Deaneries restructured for mission:** Each was asked to consider the best groupings of parishes and benefices, and for benefices to develop local ministry teams of both lay people and clergy.
- **A diocesan strategy:** the paper called on Bishop's Council to reconsider diocesan structures to make them more flexible.

Over the next five years some steps were taken to implement this but it was neither followed up nor monitored closely. Many churches received a boost in 1999-2000 with a visit from Springboard ("Daring to Share").

After a review of *Our common task* a series of consultations was held in the diocese in 2002 called *Moving forward together*. They proposed concerted restructuring with a stress on collaborative ministry.

Following these Archdeacon David Painter chaired a group which produced a report *Setting God's People Free*. It focused on the deployment of ordained and lay ministers and proposed grouping parishes and benefices into sustainable units according to population and attendance.

Parishes and individuals were invited to comment on the proposals. Many recognised the need for some radical re-structuring although the proposal for "sustainable units of mission and

ministry" went up like the proverbial lead balloon.

A working group examined in detail all 245 submissions it received, and produced a fresh report *Seeking the way together* in 2004. It was a statistical survey of the health of the diocese, and while it had no mandate to make recommendations, it did note in its reflections a number of matters including:

- Grassroots frustration at church bureaucracy;
- A strong grass-roots desire to develop and train people's gifts and to share them across parishes;
- And a longing for more effective work among children and families.



Bishop Ian then took a three-month sabbatical to reflect on this report and also to research the mission strategies of other dioceses (one result of which was a chapter which he contributed to a book on mission today). On his return he consulted widely with colleagues on the senior staff,

diocesan officers and committees, to produce the strategy which we have been following for the past four years. It was formally adopted by Diocesan Synod late in 2004.

As we shall see it has had, like its predecessors, a mixed reception. It has helped many, and been ignored by others. During 2005 packs were produced to assist PCCs and deaneries to consider the strategy and to prepare their own plans to implement it.

Each year some guidance (of mixed quality and quantity) on the current theme was issued and clergy training days and Lent meetings focused on it. However, once more the strategy was not monitored closely, and so this report cannot provide a close cause and effect analysis of the current "state of the diocese".

The Diocesan Strategy 2006-2010

**"A Diocese inspired by God's Passion for the world, building communities which are
Worship centred
Mission shaped
Releasing ministry
Transforming the world."**

The full strategy document contained a number of commitments. Primarily these were for all of us to:

- Attend to God in worship, prayer and the study of the Scriptures;
- Explore the faith and its application to daily life;
- Engage with the world in compassion, service and evangelism;
- To be inclusive and welcoming;
- To be flexible in structure;
- To be ecumenically active; and
- To be financially stable.

There followed five sections of "small print" which committed the diocese, or groups within it, to certain attitudes and actions.

It began with an **Agenda for mission**, in which the bishops affirmed the work of the clergy and charged them and the Bishop's officers to develop positive patterns of worship, teaching, training, outreach and engagement with the world.

The **Diocesan Synod** committed itself to supporting the mission and ministry of parishes, encourage leaders, and maintain the team of specialist advisers.

Bishops and Archdeacons promised to continue to listen, nurture clergy, deploy resources in collaboration with Rural Deans, consider how to fund new initiatives, and re-order central structures more flexibly.

There was a corporate **commitment to the deaneries** to encourage them to become key units for driving forward mission and ministry and to develop flexible groupings of parishes. And finally there was a Synodical commitment on **Resourcing the vision** based on the expectation that parishes raise adequate Parish Share.

The full document is available on the Diocesan web site or from the office. See page 5 for assessments by Review groups of its detailed objectives.

The overall strategy—some general assessments

Managing change— or rather, not managing change

One of the review groups (without prompting) offered varying views on “change”

Change in a diocese which contains a wide variety of churches is always difficult to manage. For it to be effective, individual churches and members have to own it.

There will always be some who resist change, but those who do need to understand that there is an ultimate cost to resistance.

There are major changes happening in society but we do not have a strategy for dealing with such things as the influx of migrants from Europe.

Clergy who were trained for one task of caring for one church are now being asked to do another task (look after several churches) for which they were never trained.

“Decline has continued through the period of the strategy, despite its commitment to growth. However, it has given people permission to try new ideas.” (RG members)

“I move on listening and thinking about the issues highlighted by the diocese and very much wanting to develop things but it is a slow and painful process and we would have been doing exactly the same without any diocesan strategy.” (RG Member)

“The strategy has awakened us to longer term initiatives. It has provided us with an important mission focus.” (Woodford Halse, LM)

“Please can we have more time to work on each strategy theme.” (Walgrave, LM)

“Strategy was great but communication was not easily accessible.” (Brackley, LM)

“We appreciate the stimulus given by the diocese with freedom to develop ministries and initiatives locally.” (St Mary Rushden, LM)

“Bishop Ian’s vision inspired me as I moved to new parishes and gave me a focus for my ministry” (RG member)

Objectives were not clear enough

Another review group felt (without prompting) that more could have been done to promote the strategy

A major criticism was that the strategy did not set out clear, measurable outcomes (although some deanery mission plans based on it do include these). The only clear action points to parishes were “raise the Share” and “increase the congregation”.

Clergy new to the diocese in the last four years said that the strategy did not form part of their briefing when they arrived, and all agreed that the parish pack produced at the start of the process “disappeared from view”. Deaneries especially struggled to get excited by the strategy.

Maintaining interest in the strategy for four years proved difficult locally. And many people still do not know the answer to the question, “What is the diocese?” Policies emanating from Diocesan Synod do not filter down to parishes easily.

However, the group was not wholly critical! It recognized that some clergy and parishes found the strategy a helpful focus for mission and ministry.

They commended the work of bishop’s officers and advisers as invaluable, and expressed a strong request that the vacant posts of rural officer and youth officer should be filled.

“Compared to some denominations, we have grounds for hope,” they agreed. “We alone of all the churches can still talk in terms of mission while they battle decline.

“But we need bishops to be more apostolic, and the roles of rural deans and clergy to be changed,” they added.

① Basic facts and figures 2005-2009

The parish pack issued in 2005 gave two growth targets: for average weekly church attendance to grow by 5 per cent, and for at least one new congregation to be planted in every deanery by or during 2007. Neither has been achieved but child/young people numbers have grown (see page 9).

All age church attendance*

Average weekly		Average Sunday		Electoral roll	
2005	2008	2005	2008	2006	2008
21,300	20,000	18,200	16,700	19,000	18,800

Clergy and licensed lay ministers**

Licensed clergy		(Incl SSMs)		Clergy with PTO		Readers	
2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
177	179	(22)	(45)	165	139	134	131

Lay Pastoral Ministers

2005	2009
84	90

Licensed Evangelists

2005	2009
26	28

Chaplains

2005	2009
23	22

Bishop’s Officers**

Full time		Part time		Voluntary	
2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
10	8	7	9	17	13

* Source: National church statistics (2008 latest available)

** Source: Peterborough Diocesan Directory

How did the strategy impact the diocese?

Bishop's Council members were asked about the impact of the strategy as a whole, and its four-year nature in particular.

On the parishes

Responses ranged from "Almost none" and "limited impact" to "encouraging activity: parishes have been given a lead as to what they should be doing." Others said that it had raised the importance of mission at the local level, and given churches permission to do new things.

On the deaneries

The comments were more positive and uniform. It provided a context for fresh thinking, encouraged activity, and placed mission on the agenda. Deanery Mission Plans are beginning to be put in place, but these are only the start of a long process and five years is a short time. The extent of the strategy's impact depended on the clergy. And deanery Synods are often overwhelmed with financial and practical matters making strategic discussion difficult.

On the diocese

The four annual themes were a useful focus in diocesan committees and events, but there was uncertainty as to how much these were picked up at parish level. The strategy was criticised for being too broad and the objectives or targets could have been clearer.

General comments made by Bishop's Council groups

- There is progress in all areas of diocesan life but it is not uniform.
- Change happens when people with vision get on with making it happen.
- We are more focused than we were in the past.
- We need to keep our feet on the pedal.

Examining the small print critically

The Review groups and Bishop's Council looked at the details of the full strategy document and its commitments. Inevitably, comments ranged widely from positive to negative. This is a summary of what they each said.

Section 1: Agenda for mission In which the bishops affirmed the work of the clergy and expected them, with the support of the bishop's officers, to :

*Develop appropriate patterns of worship to meet varying needs**

- There are more experimental forms of worship but less development of traditional regular worship.
- The number of churches adopting new technology (eg projection) does not seem to be high.
- The more educated and literate socio-economic groups seem better catered for than others.
- *Critical Mass* has been good for young people but there has not been sufficient work on Eucharistic liturgies for children and young people.

Teach and explore the faith

- There has been a significant increase in the numbers of people taking biblically based courses run by the Adult Education department.

Engage with the world in service, dialogue and evangelism; engage with public life, and build close relations with the local community.

- Ministers who are outward-looking generally have outward-looking churches.
- Appointments are now being made to pioneer mission posts.
- We are actively engaged in encouraging communities in new-build areas.
- A number of parishes are developing their own mission action plans.

* The detailed wording of the document is abbreviated here to save space.

- Ecology issues are moving up the agenda of individuals and parishes
- Too few churches are engaging in local dialogue about social issues.

Offer an effective mission to young people and families, working collaboratively with schools and other churches

- Evidence of increasing number of holiday clubs.
- Decline in numbers may not take account of those attending midweek events rather than Sunday ones.
- Collaboration has improved but there is a long way to go.
- There is a challenge in rural areas to consider the benefice as a unit rather than the parish.
- Clergy should do "priestly" things and collaborate with lay people who do the rest.
- Where there is no plant from a traditional church in a new community there is often natural co-operation.

Nurture the discipleship and release the gifts of all the people of God; supporting them in their daily work and witness; calling out and supporting ministry teams in the benefice

- Some parishes tick boxes of producing ordinands or LLMs but not necessarily releasing others for broader ministry in the world.
- There has been a growth in numbers showing interest in licensed ministry.
- "Working discipleship" programme has seen some encouragement but the topic is not on most people's agendas.
- People do not appear to see the link between what they do on Sunday and in the rest of the week.
- Churches tend to be concerned more about what people can do for them than what they can do for people.

Work ecumenically wherever possible, meeting regular with other church and faith leaders

- There is good ecumenical work in

Examining the small print (continued)

villages where two (or more) churches exist.

- Inter-faith relationships in urban areas are growing.

Section 2: Diocesan Synod In which Synod committed itself to use its historic resources and Parish Share contributions to:

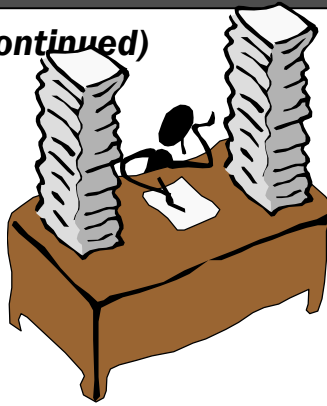
Support the ministry and mission of benefices through appropriate patterns of lay and ordained ministry

- The traditional pattern of ministry is felt to be “creaking at the seams” and no longer appropriate or sustainable.
 - The expectation of having someone present in every parish cannot be met, and some members asked if there are too many churches.
 - There is a greater need for support for clergy in multi-parish benefices. “The admin is a nightmare,” one member said. “Please push the need for Benefice Councils.”
 - The senior staff need to focus more on teaming up parishes than encouraging team ministries.
 - Deanery mission plans have been a major way of communicating fresh vision for the future.
 - Frustration was expressed about “loner” clergy who refuse to engage with wider processes, and the stubbornness of individuals or parishes which can cause re-organisation to grind to a halt.
- Score: 6***

Call, nurture and train lay and ordained leaders, encouraging them to work collaboratively

- Good training is available but people cannot be forced to take it.
- But there is no training for new PCC members; there should be.
- “Can clergy be trained to chair meetings?” asked a lay person.
- The clergy ministry review system did not give sufficient pro-

* Most of the review groups were asked to give an average score out of 10 to suggest how well they felt the various objectives had been achieved.



active support for clergy.

- There is not enough encouragement to work collaboratively (across or within parishes.)
 - Tribute was paid to the work of retired clergy and lay ministers.
- Score: 8**

Maintain a focused team of specialist advisers to resource the parishes and engage in the wider mission of the church.

- This has been done.
 - However the rural and youth officer posts remain unfilled and were felt to be of great importance.
 - Because the diocese is small, some posts might be shared with other dioceses.
 - There could be better sharing of expertise in deaneries.
- Score: 7**

Provide an efficient and effective administration .

- Members commented they could usually speak to someone in the office and that calls were returned promptly.
- The office had taken on the financial work of the cathedral,

Bishop's Council additional comments on Synod section

- There are more people coming forward for lay ministry.
- There are good examples of ministry teams working together.
- There is an on-going debate about the balance between parish and specialist staff.
- Deployment is a challenge as fewer clergy apply for vacant posts.
- The challenge of those who cannot or will not pay Parish Share remains.
- Things are moving too slowly.

which was felt to be good.

Score: 8

Section 3: Bishops and Archdeacons In which the senior staff committed themselves to work closely with Bishop's Council to:

Continue the process of listening to parish concerns in order to build a community of trust in the diocese.

- The conclusions of *Seeking the way together* have been revisited rarely, obscured by the strategy.
 - Visits to parishes enable staff to listen to wardens and PCCs but less often from church members.
 - Rural deans pass on matters of concern, and people also write in.
 - More is heard from complainants than from others.
 - Listening is a two-way process. Some people feel they have not been heard if they do not receive what they ask for—they may not listen to wider context or constraint.
 - “Building a community of trust” has not been followed through as a process but none knew how to measure it. One expressed shock at the level of distrust they found.
- Score: 6**

Nurture and support clergy and their families, affirming their key role in leadership and the importance of their well-being.

- Annual clergy days, the *Godly Leaders* course, developments in CME and ministry reviews have been attempts to affirm clergy.
- There is an improved structure for counselling and spiritual direction.
- Pastoral needs take considerable senior staff time when they arise but they have not systematically visited clergy regardless of need.
- Some suggested pastoral care of clergy is not the same as that offered by a priest to the parish.
- Housing maintenance improved since agents were changed.
- It is increasingly difficult to get clergy spouses together because of work and family demands.

Score: 6 (personal), 8 (institutional)

To deploy the available resources of the ordained ministry in collaboration with the rural deans, and to respond quickly to changing patterns of population.

- The strategy included the formation of Deanery Mission Plans. These are forthcoming slowly, and are taken seriously.
- Partnership with rural deans is generally good but we are hampered by complex legal and other structures from doing more to deploy resources in the best way.
- It is difficult to respond to changing needs quickly for the same reasons.
- The message about the total mission of the church is taking time to trickle down to parishes.

☑ Score: 7 (deployment), 4 (speed)

Provide accessible mechanisms for sharing good practice

- The FEAST group has done this for “Fresh Expressions”.
- It is done poorly on the use of church buildings. DAC is often seen as an obstacle to development.
- Partial redundancies of churches will be a future issue (i.e. using buildings for other purposes.)

☑ Score: 8 (provision), 4 (buildings)

Provide regular training for ordained and lay ministers.

- There has been a major thrust on this over the past few years.
- It is generally done well but there has been less help given on how to manage resources.

☑ Score: 8

Consider how new initiatives can be most effectively funded.

- The Mission Fund has been established and the Church Commissioners have given us extra

money for mission to new housing.

- It is becoming difficult to find suitable projects to meet Church Commissioners’ criteria.
- PFI agreements on new school builds work against us for shared-use options: rents tend to be high.
- Long-term evaluation needs to be built into all projects.

☑ Score: 9

Continue to support and focus the work of Bishop’s Officers in resourcing deaneries and benefices.

- We have protected the financing of a highly talented team.
- Management of officers is not always good.
- There is uncertainty how to manage the wider team of part-time and volunteer officers and clergy in sector ministries and chaplaincies, and support has been inadequate.

☑ Score: 8

Re-order the central structures of the diocese to provide transparent management of resources and inspirational leadership.

- There has been re-structuring of Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committees and Bishop’s Council committees.
- The new Parish Share system is generally felt to be more fair.
- We have focused on collaborative rather than inspirational leadership. As an objective it needs revision.

☑ Score: 7 (structures), 4 (“inspirational leadership”)

Set an example of collaborative and ecumenical work.

- The senior staff have sought to work collaboratively.
- Ecumenical collaboration is less easy because of differing structures and area/regional boundaries.
- There has been close co-operation with Shire and Soke and the

“A genuine attempt to put mission into practice but it is sometimes difficult to know where decisions are made.” (BC)
 “The statements were too ambitious.”
 “There should be a mission strategy but ask each parish or benefice how to achieve it”
 “None of the objectives are redundant; we are only at the start of long-term effects.”

Northampton church leaders.

☑ Score: 9

Keep these developments under review.

- The strategy’s annual themes have been kept on the agenda.
- However it has not been kept under regular review.
- There has not been any previous review of the “small print”.

☑ Score: 6

Section 4: Commitment to the deaneries

In which the senior staff working with Bishop’s Council, rural deans and lay chairs, commit to:

Encourage the deaneries (re-organised where necessary) to become key units in driving a sense of mission and ministry in the area.

- People are not convinced that the deanery is the best unit to deliver change. But deanery mission plans have helped communication.
- Even in deaneries where progress has been made, some parishes remain inward-looking.
- Deanery Synods do not always have much relevance to local church life.
- Lay chairs are not necessarily qualified to facilitate change.

☑ Score: 3-6 (group divided)

Work with the deaneries to develop flexible groupings of parishes so that they can be more effective in mission, using people’s gifts.

- It has happened in places and the strategy has put it on the agenda.
- Deaneries need to support the strategy in parishes where people’s gifts are not used.
- Readers and lay ministers do not seem to be going out much to other churches where they may be needed

① Lay training courses 2005-2009

Numbers attending general Adult Education Department courses

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
214	134	358	371	535

Numbers attending Common Ground/Licensed Lay Ministry Course

2004/5	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8	2008-9
21	27	29	26	33

The total attending LLM modules in 2009 was 95

Examining the small print (continued)

more.

- Lay ministry could be used more if churches were not so dominated by Eucharistic worship.

Score: 7

Support rural deans, lay chairs and deanery synods in guiding these developments.

- Large churches do not need the deanery to facilitate such things.
- Many deanery synod members act only as postmen to pass on information rather than take a strategic role in leadership.
- Lay chairs need a job description and training: are they to facilitate or lead?
- The relationship of rural dean and lay chair needs clarifying and both need equipping for their tasks.

Score: 3

Section 5: resourcing the vision

In which the diocese through its synod:

Expects parishes and deaneries to raise adequate parish share each year to fund the mission of the diocese including stipends, housing and training of ministers.

- Some stress hardship faced by many, others suggest the level of giving is too low.
- Unhappiness about the share may grow if clergy numbers are reduced.
- Many parishes have done well in raising share requested.
- It is felt that many church members still do not understand where the money goes.
- There was a request that the Stewardship Officer should go to non-paying parishes to help them.
- There was also a request for advice on funding building maintenance.
- Deaneries should be encouraged to help parishes facing unexpected and specific funding needs.
- Parishes which had received a reduction in one deanery refused to maintain their old level to assist others.



- We face a practical problem of having to fund two office centres.

Score: 4

Affirms the importance of maintaining a team of specialist officers to support the parishes.

- The need for a youth officer, and for local youth workers, was reiterated.

Urges senior staff to provide sufficient flexibility in the budget and deployment of clergy to respond quickly to mission needs, and to set up a mission fund.

- The mission fund has been set up.
 - Clergy have been deployed to new communities but finding suitable people is difficult.
 - The unevenness of deployment was noted: one benefice has 10% of the people in a district, but not 10% of the clergy.
 - There is a growing urban-rural divide: urban areas have 70% of population but rural areas have 70% of churches.
 - A theology of buildings is needed. Some fast-growing churches have none; we are tied to them. Urban buildings often in the wrong place.
 - Parishes need to be educated in what is happening elsewhere.
- The social case for new communities needs to be made as some parishes oppose them.

Score: 7

Expects the bishops to review vacancies with rural deans in the light of this strategy.

- The pastoral committees are working well.
- We are restricted by what can be done legally.
- We are not good at succession planning.
- The synod agenda is too big to allow serious debate on major issues, and young and talented people are not attracted to synod.

Score: 7 for handling vacancies

Strategy-centred Lent meetings 2006-2009

Each year there have been four bishop's Lent meetings in different venues across the diocese.

The aim of the meetings was to focus on that year's strategy theme and to encourage parishes to focus on it themselves.

The total attendance each year remained fairly static, between 250 and 300 people.

Over the four years, 199 parishes (out of 361 in the diocese) were represented at them but their frequency of attendance was low.

Attended 4:	25
Attended 3:	42
Attended 2:	51
Attended 1:	81

In 2010, 12 meetings were organised by and held in deaneries, 10 during Lent. Just over 70 parishes were represented (the Kettering meeting was due to be held after this report was compiled).

The Back to Church Sunday effect

Each year since 2007, churches in this diocese have taken part in the national Back to Church Sunday at the end of September. The numbers doing so have steadily declined, but the effect on those who take part is considerable.

In 2007 (the "mission-shaped" year of the strategy), half the parishes in the diocese took part, the highest proportion of any diocese in the country.

In 2009, only 69 churches took part, and some of the training events had to be cancelled. Yet participating churches attracted an average 25 additional attendees each and showed almost 55% increase on their average Sunday attendance.

Nationally, in 2009, the average extra attendees was 14 per church (20 per Church of England church), and an estimated 81,900 extra people across Britain attended that day.

Something to celebrate—what we have achieved

Imagination, innovation and growth of children’s and families’ work

It is impossible to list all the achievements of the past five years that were reported in the Articles of Enquiry and the Lent meeting returns: there are simply too many of them. They are not even easy to categorise and enumerate, because they are so diverse.

But some statistics do stand out. The forms from the Lent meetings asked people simply to note down their achievements over the past four years. Out of 77 returns, only 4 failed to note anything positive, and only two of them were wholly negative (see page 12).

And work among children and young families seems to have enjoyed a boom (see box below). The activities included under the blanket heading vary from new holiday clubs and parent and toddler groups to re-started Sunday Schools and children’s choirs.

Allowing for the fact that the Lent meetings may have been attended only by people from active parishes this still means that one fifth of the diocese is to be very active—and it is inconceivable that all the parishes

which were not represented are stuck in the doldrums.

Add to this the reports that have appeared in diocesan publications and DVDs—not all of which were mentioned in paper returns—and you have a picture of a diocese with a fair share of life and vitality.

That is not the picture which many people have. Perhaps we simply do not regard our small efforts in our corner of the diocese as of special merit. Perhaps they are overshadowed in our thinking by declining overall attendances, pressing concerns and the constant struggle to pay our way.

But to gain a true picture of the diocese we should note the strengths as well as the weaknesses, and celebrate the good as well as mourn (and seek to rectify) the bad. Even if the picture here is not reflected in our locality, we can still obey St Paul’s injunction to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”. On the next couple of pages are some snapshots to illustrate this diversity of achievement.



Where we have put our energies

The most frequently mentioned things on the Lent meeting forms in response to the question: “What has been good in your parish over the past four years? Think of examples of what you feel you have achieved.”

Growth in child /youth attendance or work	49 (63.6%) *
More diversity in worship	31 (40.25%)
Use of Alpha and similar groups, home groups	24 (31.1%)
Increase in schools contact / work	24 (31.1%)
New LLMs/lay helpers/people training	23 (29.8%)
Improved benefice co-operation, services etc	17 (22%)
Adult attendance growth (incl. family services)	16 (20.7%)
Ecumenical services / co-operation	14 (18%)
Reordering / building improvement	13 (16.8%)
Visiting pastoral groups (various purposes)	12 (15.6%)
Lunch clubs / other events for the elderly	12 (15.6%)
Increased charitable giving	7 (9%)

* Percentages are of the base figure of 77 forms received.



Holiday clubs grow in popularity

In 2009 there were at least 60 holiday

clubs held in churches across the diocese (16% of all parishes but many clubs covered whole benefices), drawing at least 3154 children, an average of 52 per club. (AAE)

“Greatly encouraged by family outreach and involvement with the school”
(Great Creaton, AAE 2008)

Young people grow

Between 2007 and 2008 the average weekly attendance of people under 16 in Peterborough Diocese grew from 3,700 to 4,100 (an increase of 10%).

Forty-four per cent of churches* in 2008 reported that they had some kind of children’s, youth or family activity.
*98 out of 222 AAE returns

Saints and Drews, a regular Saturday event for families and children at Kettering St Andrew, attracting over 150 people, won first prize in a national competition in 2007 to recognise churches that have successfully adapted to a changing



- Monthly all age service
- Renovated the organ
- Vocations to lay and ordained ministry

- Established children’s choir
- Revitalised work with mothers and small children
- Club for young communicants
- Increase in contact with all schools
- Revitalised building and maintenance group (new blood!)
- Increase in house groups
- Groups for bereaved people
- Broadening range of music styles
- About to finalise our mission action plan for next five years.

(Brackley St Peter, LM)

Examples of what parishes have achieved



- Increased visitor numbers
- Greater sense of unity
- Good core of young people
- Reordering of font to centre of nave
- Good relationship with other churches in Peterborough (Peterborough Cathedral, LM)



Orthodox and Pentecostal churches. We are trying to reduce our carbon footprint through solar panels and better heating. We try to encourage people to live their Christian faith in the world." (St Crispin group, Northampton, LM)



- Christmas shoeboxes to Bungoma
- Charity motorbike event
- "Electric church" for

younger people.

- Village lunches
- Joint remembrance service with nearby air base
- Benefice suppers twice a year with guest speakers
- Ecumenical services with chapel
- Whit walk around whole benefice
- New enthusiastic lay readers
- Bell ringers re-invigorated (Helmdon/Astwell benefice, LM)

- Two Alpha courses
- Trip to Holy Land
- More visiting
- Holiday club
- Introduced new worship songs
- New patterns of worship
- Increased use of IT
- Bible challenge (reading from cover to cover)
- Barbecue Songs of Praise
- Feast of tabernacles (Faxton Group, LM)



- Pre-school group started
- Holiday club established
- Family service established
- Home groups established

- Regular Lent and Advent groups
- Reader trained (Kings Cliffe etc, LM)

- Seven years of congregation growth
- Creation and development of ministry team
- Meet regularly with Baptist colleagues
- Installed coffee machines in two parishes
- New and vibrant link with Bungoma
- Close contact with church school (Lambfold benefice, LM)



"So many come to view the church as a place where they are always welcomed." (Nassington, LM)



- Saturday morning coffee shop with full breakfast. Parish nurse and listeners there. Attracted people who haven't been to church before. Some go into the church for prayer.
- Holiday at home for the elderly
- Men's group started
- Children's holiday club started
- Camera club started
- Songs of praise and tea for elderly (Wellingborough St Mark, LM)

"The small congregation have been regular and faithful worshippers and generous donors of time and money. We have gained four new members. A bi-ennial 'Brass in the Park' held in beautiful gardens." (Norton, LM)



"Formation of group ministry has given the opportunity to engage with the community. Work with the homeless, elderly and schools is ongoing. We have put on holiday clubs and hosted cultural days and begun to bring different ethnic groups together. We now share church buildings with Romanian Orthodox, Russian



"11 lay ministers trained or in training—doubled over five years. A lot of disabled people have joined us with their carers and felt included in every way." (Corby St Columba, LM)

"A small loving community which has been moving to a place of many seeds of growth starting to germinate, learning to be more outward focusing." (Peterborough St Jude, LM)



"Pastoral services with fringe / outside community—eg canal boat community. Concerts and plays after short Evensong." (Welford, LM & AAE)



- Street church
- Support Kings Heath
- Two members ordained
- Joint Alpha course with other churches
- Holiday at home for housebound elderly people
- Interns for one year—in-service training scheme for young people
- Second growing leaders course in progress
- Help to resource Messy Church in Gt Houghton
- Lunch Club attendance increased
- Teen groups (Just Girls; Kick Start)
- Marriage and parenting courses (Northampton St Giles)

On the positive side—notes of appreciation

"DAC office always helpful" (Gt Harrowden 2008)

"Thanks for help and support for new extensions." (Greens Norton 2008)

"History Society in village helping to investigate grants for kitchen project." (Langham 2009)

"Hope to review our giving." (Ryhall 2008)

"Parish share formula is now sensible and fair." (Longthorpe, LM)

"Grateful for support received whilst priest was ill, especially from archdeacon and rural dean." (Anon 2008)

"Thanks for advice and support from archdeacon." (Badby; Helmdon; Welton)

"Appreciate help from diocese in complicated pastoral reorganisation." (Blisworth 2009)



And now for something completely different...

A selection of unusual activities reported in the 2008 and 2009 Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry

Food, glorious food (and drink)

- Village family brunch (Ashwell)
- Picnic event in country park (Gt Doddington)
- Safari and harvest suppers: "50% attending were non church goers" (Sulgrave)
- Pancake lunch for village (Paulerspury)
- Pints of view in pub (Kettering St Andrew)
- Thank you supper for all helpers (Farthingstone)

History and horror

- 1066 pageant, 350 took part (Charwelton)
- Murder mystery (Lt Harrowden)
- Harvest and heritage weekend (Glinton)

Out and about

- Community fun day (Corby St Columba)
- Halloween visitation with sweets and church information (Northampton St Mary)
- Carol singing in local pub (Newton Bromswold)
- Rogation walk after farm service (Walgrave)

Stirring the fire

- "Fan the flame" events (several churches; "successful"- Thorpe Malsor)
- Ecumenical two-week mission with Daniel Cozens (Lilbourne)

Community in mind

- Street representation scheme (Warmington)
- Involvement with parish council (Middleton Cheney)
- International coffee morning (Northampton Christ Church)

Animal capers

- "Jumping over the cockerel before placing it on the spire." (Whitfield)
- "Celebration of the horse" outdoor service (Slapton)



Mixed picture for lay ministry

Releasing—making better use of, giving permission for, training, encouraging and equipping for—lay ministry was the key strategy theme for 2008.

This included both licensed lay ministry (licensed pastoral ministers formerly called pastoral assistants, licensed [formerly parish] evangelists and readers) and the thousand and one other things that church members do often without thinking of it as "ministry" - from administration to youth group leadership, from cleaning, catering and maintenance to serving as church wardens, PCC and synod members.

Plus, of course, the key ministry of being "walking advertisements" for Jesus Christ and his church in the family, community, recreation and workplace every day. The growth in numbers taking

i Parishes mentioning lay ministry in Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry 2009

Lay leadership of services excluding Bible readings, intercessions: 49 (20%)*.

In addition, 22 (9%) reported active licensed readers but did not say how they were used.

Lay involvement in pastoral care: 27 (11%)

* Base figure of 247 returns

various courses (see box on page 7) may indicate that the strategy gave a stimulus to lay ministry. Other factors such as fewer stipendiary and more self-supporting clergy (see figures on page 4) may also have helped some realise that the clergy just cannot do everything.

Responses during parish vacancies are intriguing. Five said in their 2009 AAE returns that they could not release lay ministry because they were in interregnum. Several others, however, said they used the vacancy to involve more people in all aspects of church life.

Cameos of lay ministry

"Reluctant to hold lay led services in such a small community despite

there not being a satisfactory pattern of services." (Ridlington)

"Lay cover half services." (Warkton)

"Benefice setting up a local ministry team which it is hoped will release ministry of more people." (Charcombe)

"Interregnum caused increased lay activity in all areas." (Badby)

"New team of officers and revived PCC—all good news." (Murcott)

"Struggling with death of churchwarden who held all the knowledge." (Barby)

"Small PCC; no-one coming forward to help." (Stanwick)

"Difficult year—lay team decreasing." (Northampton St Alban).

"Very strong committed lay team, active in community and able to keep spiritual momentum during vacancy." (East Haddon)

"Church pastoral team taking on more routine visits rather than clergy." (Oundle)

"Practical help for the elderly and those in need including visiting, transport, shopping, caring for people outside the congregation too." (Preston Deanery)

"Pastoral visiting team set up" (Kings Sutton; Northampton All Saints)

Source: AAE 2009

Nurses are part of the team

"Parish nurses" are a growing group of lay ministers nationally. Two churches in this diocese have them—Oakham and Wellingborough St Mark.

The appointment of Lesley Johnson in Wellingborough was assisted by a Mustard Seed grant from the national Church Urban Fund.

"It's about whole person health care and it's been lovely to see people ministering to each other and building up the body of Christ," she told *Vocation Voices* in 2006.



Where we and parishes have not done so well

Responses to the Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry naturally gave people the opportunity to express concerns. Inevitably, many criticisms related to parish share and church buildings. They were also asked to express their needs for the future, which overlap and in this report are mostly on pages 14 and 15. Two people at the Lent meetings indicated that all was not well in their parish, and their words are included here. The review groups expressed a variety of criticisms and these have been recorded along with their positive comments on pages 4-8.

The burden of buildings

In the "Your turn" section for additional comments on the Archdeacons' Articles, 19.6%* of respondents made comments about buildings without prompting. Of these, 31% complained about the system. Here are some of them.

"Efforts to improve security frustrated by English Heritage—quite cross." (Elton 2008)

"Disappointed English Heritage and the like have so much influence over DAC decisions." (Gayton 2008)

"DAC advice on new stained glass window led to much upset and disappointment." (Irthlingborough 08)

"Concern over roof. Need to use Collyweston slate. Feel it's a large expense and money could be spent better elsewhere ie in Bungoma." (Kettering St Andrew 2008)

"Lack of progress on roof repairs causing concern. Parish is responding well with fundraising but waiting for DAC and English Heritage." (Lowick 2008)

"More streamlined faculty procedure needed." (Marston Trussell 2009)

"Find DAC a barrier." (Orlisbury 2009) "Hard to get answers from" (Ryhall, 2009)

"Frustration about slow process for getting toilet installed." (Walgrave 08)

"Too much bureaucracy in maintaining church" (Seaton 2008).

* 35 out of 178 who filed responses in this section

The struggle with parish share

Also in the "Your turn" section 9.5% of responses raised the issue of parish share. Most expressed anxiety or anger about it. Here are some.

"Feel ignored with regards to parish share. Don't have enough people to meet costs." (Collingtree 2008)

"Parish share doesn't relate to parish priest's time. Sometimes have to invite other priests to cover services." (Cosgrove 2008)

"Concern benefice is expected to pay housing costs for non-existent priest." (Edith Weston 2008)

"Difficulty of meeting parish share. Too great an increase. We do have a commitment to keeping churches in good repair as well as paying parish share!" (Maidford 2009)

"Ageing congregation of limited means had to pay parish share. Maintenance on back burner to detriment of building." (Weedon Bec 2008)

General and wider matters of concern

"Fear high anglo-catholic tradition is off putting to younger and unchurched people." (Pattishall, 2008)

"Decision making at diocesan level takes too long—makes planning difficult." (Byfield 2008)

"Feel diocesan administration should be more proactive in releasing clergy of multi-parish benefices from the burden of administration." (Harlestone 2008)

"Urge archdeacons to make parish rather than benefice visitations."

Cries from the heart

"Going back 10 years or so we had good family services, Sunday School, and a mums and tots group. We used to have Lent and Advent groups in the benefice and many social and fund raising events. Nothing like this happens now. Numbers attending church have declined. Sadly our minister shows little interest in the parish. Nothing will improve until he leaves. Please help us."

"Sadly nothing has been good. It is a very sad and bad place we are in. Please remove our minister. He is not a Christian."

"We would like more initiatives and leadership from our priest. Disappointed at the level of support received so far."

These situations were described on Lent meeting forms. The parishes involved are known to diocesan staff who seek to resolve such problems within current legal and pastoral constraints.

What you think about the clergy!

Some church wardens used "Your turn" to comment on clergy. 19.6% (35) did so and were generally positive. But they also highlighted some concerns.

Of the 35, 16 (45.7%) expressed concern about clergy workloads. "Stretched to breaking point" was one observation.

Seven (20%) made comments about the length of vacancies or losing clergy, six (17%) said how pleased they were with clergy, and two said they were unhappy with theirs.

(Culworth 2009)

"Some dissent amongst regular churchgoers following changes in service times." (Litchborough 2009)

"Concerned about maintenance of large central staff and decrease in stipendiary clergy" (Horton 2008)

"Can do little due to small congregation" (Gayton 2008)

"No obvious change." (Name of parish supplied, 2008)



So where do we go from here?

At the Lent meetings, people were asked to complete a second form

which asked simply, “What do you need help with in the future? Think of specific things you would like to achieve over (say) the next five years.” They were given no suggestions about what to put.

Therefore when almost half raised the matter of buildings, and almost a quarter issues around finance and clergy deployment, there are some clear convergences of opinion about priorities at grass roots which will come as little surprise to many, not least because they tally with some of the concerns expressed in the Archdeacons’ Articles of Enquiry (see previous page).

But equally significant were the other high scores. Over a third expressed interest in increasing lay training and ministry and in matters relating to children and young people; over a quarter in reaching out in mission (to increase numbers); just under a quarter in spiritual growth and a similar number in greater inter-action with the local community. All these, of course, formed or were part of the major themes of the strategy which we are now reviewing.

No causal relationship between the strategy and these responses can be proved. The coincidence may only suggest that the strategy accorded with ongoing popular concerns, rather than that it prompted them. But it also suggests that parishes want the core themes of the strategy to remain in the forefront of diocesan life in the near future.

As before, the comments quoted may not be representative of a whole benefice, but only of those who attended the meetings. And the comments are mixed between local aspirations and requests for wider assistance, and the difference is not always clear on the forms.

i What we need help with and want to achieve

The most frequently mentioned categories mentioned on the Lent meeting forms in response to the questions “What do you need help with? And “What do you hope to achieve?”

Better amenities/development of building	35 (45.5%) *
Reaching young people / young families	30 (39%)
Lay assistants / leaders / training for lay people	28 (36.4%)
Increasing congregation / making most of contacts	21 (27.3%)
Incumbent / curate / pioneer minister	17 (22%)
Stewardship / funding assistance	17 (22%)
Developing prayer/spiritual life, discipleship	17 (22%)
Interaction/involvement with the community	17 (22%)
Building benefice cohesion	11 (14.3%)
More varied services/activities incl. weekdays	9 (11.7%)
Closer ties with other churches (ecumenical/deanery)	6 (7.8%)

* Base figure: 77 forms received

Buildings

“Some of the restrictions on historic buildings need to be got rid of. The historical interest societies and English Heritage cause real grief to the congregations of small parish churches who cannot reorder to make their building living places of service rather than museums.”
(Chenderit benefice)

“Think about closing some of the churches.” (Faxton group)

“Help to get faculties through the system faster. This is the 21st century. We are still waiting for faculties for reordering and re-hanging the bells.” (Kings Cliffe)

“The length of time taken to process faculty applications stifles initiative, increases the cost, and disillusion volunteers.” (Wing etc)

“Getting rural listed buildings in a position to cope with youth etc. Woodburner for pews. Oh, and heating.” (Etton etc)

Structures

“We don’t talk about Christianity we talk about the building. Rationalise the bureaucracy of the PCC.” (Faxton group)

“Would like ‘benefice’ to become more personally connected to ‘the diocese’. Eg back to Church Sunday email was welcomed and easily understood.” (Stoke Albany)

“Develop rural awareness—different

needs in a diocese where a large proportion of the population is rural. Need to develop stronger links with the diocesan headquarters and cathedral in Peterborough.” (Barby)

“Speeding up processes in the diocese generally. It would also help to be left without changes for a reasonable time to build on ideas within the benefice.” (Barrowden etc)

“Input from the Church of England regarding the debate between science and creation and some of the pressing issues of the day.” (Crick)

Lay ministry and training

“In line with the trend of greater efficiency of mission we would like help with the ongoing training at the relevant level for lay ministry, especially as we face interregnum followed by reduced staffing levels. Where can we seek advice regarding the most appropriate and ‘fit for purpose’ training?” (Woodford Halse etc)

“Teaching and equipping of members so that they become leaders needs to be done locally as well as using diocesan opportunities.” (Oundle)

“More practical training of church officers in more local areas, either benefice wide or in a group of benefices rather than archdeaconries.”
(Rutland Water)

“Help with discernment ministry to identify lay members’ gifts and training resources to develop those

Where we want to go (continued)



gifts and use them in the community. For better use of general and leadership skills in the laity to assist clergy and LLMs to deliver services to the community and provide finance, legal, accounting, human resources, counselling and many other skills to develop and backstop skills weaknesses in the clergy." (Corby St Columba)

Clergy and officers

"Thinness of staff in relation to what needs to be done, especially pastorally." (Welford)

"The [current] support from a retired priest we see as essential to free [the incumbent] to be fully involved with each service instead of having to rush from church to church. This is essential if he is to develop both Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic services as he has a vision to do." (Eye etc)

"Less 'enablers' and more practical priests in the parishes." (Rutland Water group)

Mission

"A fresh outlook! Involvement with families, services to suit young Christians. House groups." (Brixworth)

"We have become very tired of the emphasis on raising money and look to reaching out to our communities and meeting their needs. [A meeting is planned] to set out a few objectives that we can all commit to." (Potterspurty etc).

"Vastly increase the spiritual awareness amongst current congregation and their families and especially those in the parish who seem unable to access the spiritual aspect of their lives. Through this awareness we would hope to further our mission of making and sustaining Christians. To make an increased contribution to the wider community outside the benefice and internationally in working towards greater understanding and tolerance between races and religions." (East Haddon)

"Empowerment, encouragement,

"Help in producing initiatives to draw in fathers to the worship." (Gt and Lt Addington)

"To look at the 'revolving door' of casual attendees. Learning to support a transient population. (Wootton etc)

"Keeping occasional worshippers as regulars." (Lyddington)

"To encourage more people from ethnic minorities to take part in the running of the church." (Northampton St James)

"A greater sharing of ideas for mission between parishes" (St Crispin group)

"Balance between serving community and growing disciples. Vital to put Christ first in everything, rather than the add-in." (Oundle)

"We are exploring setting up a group to help with English literacy for our large immigrant community." (Peterborough St Jude)

Fuller responses from Lent meetings about future plans and concerns



- Ground source heating
- Kitchen/toilet in all 7 churches
- Services during week

- Greater lay participation in services
- Licensed lay ministers
- House groups
- Parish awaydays / holidays (Faxton group)

- Grow new leaders
- Resources (finances, time, buildings fit for purpose)
- Grow the vision of what is possible
- Grow congregation from 300 to 600
- Grow staff team from 8 to 12
- Grow relationships with community, schools, college.
- Reaching out to all generations (Moulton)



- Increased licensed trained ministry / youth worker
- More training to bring out lay skills
- More recognition of unseen roles
- More resources, ideas, imagination
- Recognition of individuals' skills; to

give confidence to take ideas forward even if they don't work. (Raunds etc)



- Maintaining contact with children as they reach teen age
- Come to terms with very small congregations and emphasise that church is people of God not house(s) of God

• Maintain historic buildings in face of falling congregations or having courage to let them go

• Take the church to the people on the other side of [dividing] road (Kings Cliffe etc)

• Skeleton teaching aids to deepen the growth of the church. Something we can personalise but avoid duplication of effort.



- External audit to encourage us (sanity check!)
- Re-ordering the worship space to facilitate greater flexibility in worship and hospitality to the wider community
- Deepen the prayer life through a monthly prayer breakfast

- Develop links with schools esp. secondary (new territory for us)
- Making the most of all contacts
- Continuing opportunities to share what has happened in other places (Brackley St Peter)



• Plan regular children's activity days

- Lay-led worship, variety of leaders
- Midweek café church for all ages
- Engaging in groups in village
- Praying for visiting playgroups, schools, elderly people in a pastoral team ministry. (Mears Ashby)

• Engaging with un-churched and de-churched



- How to move out of inherited constraints?
- How to encourage the elderly to remain involved?
- Saturday morning "open church" needs rebranding. (Gt Doddington etc)



- More people to realise their ministry and offer



“Finding new ways of reaching different people. How do we make a difference in our community with our limited resources?” (Castor etc)

“Consideration to what does the wider community want/need rather than what could we do.” (Wellingborough All Saints)

“We are now inspired to meet and discuss at greater length and prayerfully what our next steps are. Watch this space!” (Uppingham)

Finance

“Parish share formula to be changed so that it penalises growth less than at present (eg 16-21 year olds who largely aren’t in employment).” (Rushden Whitefriars)

“Establish counselling to help the challenges of the recession.” (Passenham etc)

themselves for training

- Provide stepping stones for people on the fringe be become integrated
 - Ministry to the housebound
 - Midweek after-school activity
 - Ways of reaching youth (help!)
 - Intercessory prayer chain
 - How to do this with limited resources?
- (Wellingborough St Mark)

- Increase in congregation
 - Increase willingness of wider group of people to undertake responsibility
 - Raising funds
 - Healing service several times a year
 - More joint benefice musical events
- (Creaton etc)



- Help to develop our young people’s work
 - Take new initiatives with families and young children
 - Make our building more welcoming for adults and children
 - We would like church buildings to be used more by the community
 - We would like more licensed people within the life of the church
- (Rushden St Mary)

Dear Bishop Donald,...

People attending the Lent meetings were invited to note specific requests for or comments to our new bishop. They were very wide ranging and to an extent overlap with what has gone before. However, these matters were singled out as matters of real concern. Here is a selection which covers every topic that was raised.



Geography: “The ability to attend diocesan meetings nearer than Peterborough” (Syresham)

“We are 68 miles from Peterborough and 30 miles from Northampton. All training courses in these locations are not encouraging. Public transport is virtually non-existent.” (Chenderit)

Communication: “Consider how communication styles have changed in the last 10 years. Is the diocese out of date?” (Brackley)

“We would like an audio CD from you to play in church. We would like to hear you talk about your vision for the diocese.” (Walgrave)

“Size of vision. So much feels disappointingly small scale. Passion needs conveying from Bishop down for big missions.” (Welford etc)

“A seasonal pastoral letter from the bishop would be very much appreciated.” (Crick)

Help us please: “Please help us. Some of us are losing faith in the church of England. Please help us restore this. Our church building is sad, our church is sad as well because of the problems with our minister.” (Parish name supplied)

“Support and advise the parish going through the aftermath of [bad] publicity relating to a former priest.” (Parish name supplied)

Strategy: “The strategy must be realistic and understood by all.” (Corby St Columba)

“Strategy needs to be simple and personal.” (Stoke Albany etc)

Big issues: “Speak out for the church in an accessible way in the local press and radio.” (Heyford etc)

Structures: “A speeding up of diocesan processes.” (Rutland Water)

“Need to think through priorities to be covered by diocesan officers (eg currently children’s but no youth officer). More promotion of local parish mission action plans.” (Whitefriars)

Buildings/money: Please look at the issues of parish share for larger parishes who need more staff to accomplish the work they are called to do.” (Werrington)

“Need a serious look at diocesan expenditure (other than stipends/pensions) where savings can be made and to clearly state where they are so that laity can identify.” (Oakham)

“We need to be more benefice-focused, and less parish focused—we cannot run multiple small village parishes as though each one still has a parish priest rather than sharing one with 4 or 5 others.” (Tove)

“Concern over increasing financial demands: parish share and care of buildings. Both can inhibit mission.” (Gt Doddington etc)

Ministry, training: “Clergy must be empowered and trained to release and empower lay ministry.” (Corby St Columba)

“Distribution of communion by licensed lay people—this would really help rural parishes. A clear policy re SSMS and incorporation into parish/deanery/diocese.” (Etton etc)

“Is there a chance of having Locally Ordained Minister working just in their own parish?” (Raunds etc)

“Support parishes in recognising and celebrating what as already been achieved.” (Wootton etc)

Not included are: Those who said “come and visit us” (he’ll try!). And the many who said “welcome” (he’s grateful!).

Reflections

The purpose of this report is just that—to report. The comments it records indicate a number of matters about which Bishop Donald, in consultation with his staff, the diocesan synod and bishop's council must decide what (if anything) to do and how to prioritise their responses.

However, it may not be clear from the previous pages that some responses suggest that some people labour under misconceptions which may be a hindrance to diocesan cohesion and local mission.



One is the alleged increase of central staff at the expense of parish clergy; the box on page 4 shows that the number of advisers has decreased. (The office staff remained static over the period despite increased workloads due in part to changes in legislation.)

The number of clergy has also remained static although that is due to an increase in self-supporting priests who are not often able to give as much time to parishes as stipendiary priests. The decline in stipendiary priests is a national problem due to a bulge of retirements not being matched by a similar bulge of ordinations. Allied to this is an apparent ignorance of what parish share is for and how it is spent.

A second myth is that this diocese is largely rural. Geographically it may be, but in mission terms it is not. 70% of the population is in urban or suburban areas; 70% of church buildings are in rural areas. Urban clergy generally have much higher populations to care for than those in rural areas, even allowing for multi-parish benefices.

Thirdly, a number of returns asking for help did not seem to know that the help they desire is already available at the end of the phone. And fourthly, some are clearly unaware of the legal constraints on the Church of England regarding its responsibility for buildings and the independence of its clergy who are not employees in the usual sense.

These misconceptions may indicate a failure in communication; perhaps they reinforce the need noted by several respondents for improved induction and training for lay officers and clergy. Which is more work, for someone!

Sources and contributors

Compiler

Derek Williams

Research

Special thanks to Alex Low who made a detailed analysis of hundreds of responses to Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry. *Additional research by* Sally Crossley, Liz Gray, Gillian Spokes.

Review groups

Facilitator: Bob Purser
Contributors: Tim Allebone, Christine Allsopp, Miles Baker, Shena Bell*, David Bird, Peter Breckwoldt, Tony Bryer, Simon Dommett, John Flack, Giles Godber, Robert Hill, Julie Hutchinson, Jim Mynors, David Painter, Stephen Partridge, Kate Payne, Chris Peck, Richard Pestell, Sheila Robertson, Ann Slater, Charles Taylor, Anne Toms, Frank White, David Wiseman.

**Provided written comment.*

Special thanks to those who battled through blizzards to attend.

Lent meetings

Parishes / benefices which filed feedback sheets (by deanery, church dedication omitted except in towns, and first parish in benefice plus "etc" when respondents represented all):

Brackley: Astwick Vale benefice, Brackley, Chenderit benefice, Helmdon, Syresham, Weedon Lois, Whitfield, Woodford Halse

Brixworth: Brixworth, Creaton & Cottesbrooke, Crick, East Haddon, Faxton group, Haselbech, Naseby, Norton.

Corby: St Columba, St Peter & St Andrew, Great Oakley etc, Gretton etc, Stoke Albany etc.

Daventry: Barby with Kilsby, Daventry team, Heyford etc, Weedon etc.

Higham: Gt & Lt Addington, Finedon, Higham Ferrers, Raunds

etc, Rushden St Mary, Rushden St Peter, Whitefriars.

Greater Northampton: Duston, St Benedict, St Crispin group, St Giles, St James, Moulton, Wootton etc.

Oundle: Barnwell etc, Kings Cliffe etc, Nassington etc, Oundle.

Peterborough: All Saints, Barnack etc, Castor etc, Cathedral, Christ the Carpenter, Etton, Eye etc, Glinton, Longthorpe, Paston, St John, St Jude, St Mark, St Mary, St Paul, Werrington.

Rutland: Belton, Barrowden etc, Lyddington etc, Oakham, Rutland Water benefice, Uppingham, Wing etc.

Towcester: Collingtree, Lambfold benefice, Passenham etc, Potterspurty etc, Silverstone, Tove benefice.

Wellingborough: All Hallows, All Saints, Gt Doddington etc, Gt Harrowden etc, Mears Ashby etc, St Andrew, St Barnabas, St Mark, Yardley Hastings.

Kettering: meeting due to take place after this report was compiled. Its responses will be fully noted with the rest and passed to Bishop Donald.

And comments from discussion groups at Bishop's Council on 16 January 2010.

The notes from the Review Groups, and the Lent meeting forms, can be viewed on request. We will however need to ask for a contribution to cover reproduction and postage costs.

This report was discussed at the Diocesan Synod on 24 April 2010. Comments made in small groups and by individuals were noted, summarised in *Synod News* and passed to Bishop Donald to assist his thinking and planning.