

GENERAL SYNOD

Making New Disciples: the Growth of the Church of England

1. This paper is the report of the task group appointed by the Archbishops in response to the motion passed at General Synod on 9 July 2011:

That this Synod

- a) *recognise the urgent missionary task facing the Church of England to reverse decades of numerical decline and make new disciples for Jesus Christ in every community in our land;*
 - b) *welcome the priority given to facilitating church growth in Challenges for the New Quinquennium (GS 1815) and Challenges for the New Quinquennium – Next steps (GS Misc 995);*
 - c) *affirm the experience of a remarkable and growing number of parishes that find mission action planning to be a strategic tool which helps them grow in faith, in numbers and in service to their community; and*
 - d) *call on the Archbishops' Council to work with the House of Bishops to develop the priorities identified in Challenges for the New Quinquennium (GS 1815) and further outlined in Challenges for the New Quinquennium – Next steps (GS Misc 995) into a national mission strategy that will support dioceses, deaneries and parishes in their own church growth and mission planning.*
2. Much work has been done by the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishops on developing the three quinquennium goals set out in the Presidential Address of November 2010 into a mission strategy for the national Church. The breadth of work that has been undertaken on all three goals since the above motion was passed is covered in GS Misc 1025, *Pursuing the three Quinquennium Goals*, under the headings of Going for Growth, Reimagining Ministry, and Contributing to the Common Good. The focus of this task group has been firmly on the first of these themes, taking forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church through the challenge of making new disciples for Jesus Christ in every community. The task group on re-imagining ministry is working on a separate report entitled *Instruments of Love and Grace*.

The Priority of Making New Disciples

3. The national mission strategy called for in the Synod motion requires reflection on why the making of new disciples should be a priority for the Church.

It matters because it's God's mission

4. The mission of the Church is its calling to share in the mission of God the Father to restore the fallen creation to Him through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy

Spirit, making manifest His Kingdom.¹ Mission is about being sent – sent by a God who is a missionary. This mission of God (*missio dei*) is cosmic in scope, encompassing the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and flows out of the nature of the Trinity as a fount of sending love. As *Mission-Shaped Church* put it, ‘It is not the Church of God that has a mission to the world, but the God of Mission who has a Church in the world.’²

5. Although mission is wider than evangelism, the mission of God is not being undertaken in all its fullness unless people are called to become disciples of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament the making of new disciples seems to arise not so much from ‘ought’ as from ‘overflow’. The motivation to proclaim the faith and make new disciples arises from our response to the grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ – what Thangaraj describes as ‘loving gratitude’.³
6. Making new disciples is also our response to Christ’s commission (recorded in different forms in all four gospels) to proclaim the good news (what Newbiggin calls the ‘public truth’) of what God has done in the incarnation, atonement and resurrection, motivated by the love of Christ for all people. As Johannes van den Berg put it, drawing on 2 Corinthians 5: 14, we are ‘constrained by Jesus’ love’.⁴
7. The focus of this paper, responding to the General Synod motion, is on making new disciples but that emphasis needs to be held holistically with other parts of the Church’s mission. The Quinquennial Goals set by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his presidential address were as follows:
 1. to take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England – including the growth of its capacity to serve the whole community of this country;
 2. to re-shape or reimagine 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; and
 3. to focus our resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity.’
8. By linking the goal of spiritual and numerical growth with an increase in the Church’s ‘capacity to serve the whole community of this country’ these quinquennial goals give us a clear framework of *spiritual growth - numerical growth - kingdom growth*; all of which need to be held inextricably together. A vibrant Church which grows new disciples will have more energy to transform the world through the power of God’s love. This holistic vision of growth is focused on the Kingdom of God, not just on church attendance. Yet without a regular flow of new disciples, the Church will be less and less able to fulfil its calling to be an agent of God’s transformation in the world.

¹ *Resourcing Mission for a 21st Century Church*, 2006, (GS Misc 810), p.3

² *Mission-Shaped Church*, 2004, p.85

³ *The Common Task*, T Thangaraj, Abingdon, 1999

⁴ Title of his inquiry into the motives of the missionary awakening in Great Britain, quoted in Bosch, p.296

Making new disciples matters to the whole Church

9. It follows from the above that making new disciples should be a priority for all parts of the Church. However, in some circles there is a latent fear that a commitment to evangelism is about advancing Evangelicalism (the name for one tradition of churchmanship in the Church of England). This fear must be acknowledged, since it is real, but challenged robustly. Evangelism/evangelisation is core to the vocation of every Christian and every church community.
10. Faith for some Christians starts with the ethical teaching of the gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount. As one experienced priest has put it, “Having spent years saying that ‘you don’t have to go to church to be good’, it was little surprise that no one much came to church and *no one knew how to be good.*” A strong Christian community is the place where people learn about the Christian calling to live a good life, and where attitudes and behaviour change.⁵ There can be no authentic Christian ethics without a faithful community to embody it.
11. For other Christians, the central identity of the Church lies in the Eucharist as “the people’s liturgy”. Whilst, “two or three gathered together” is the basic building block of every Christian community, the regular celebration of the Eucharist as the presence here and now in the Christian community of Christ’s once-and-for-all offering of himself as a sacrifice for the reconciliation of God and humankind is about participating in the universal Church with brothers and sisters in Christ across all the continents and all the ages. Maintaining this continuity of community necessitates the making of new Christians because God’s mission is focused, actualised and celebrated above all in the Eucharist, and we are committed to co-operate with him and to help others to realise his saving presence for themselves.
12. Even those who see the Church as a kind of underground cell maintaining the tradition of holiness against a hostile and oppressive culture must agree that making new members is vital to the endurance of holiness and truth.
13. These examples are not intended to address every shade of Anglican opinion, but to suggest that the priority of growth is an authentic core component for all the traditions within the Church. It is vital, therefore, the conversation around the national mission strategy must articulate the imperative of growth in the language of diverse Christian traditions.

The vital importance of making new disciples

14. The Church of England’s attendance figures have shown gentle decline over many decades. The headline figures hide another significant trend – the rise in average age. In 1981 the churchgoing population had an average age which was (very slightly) *younger* than that of the general population (36 against 36.6). The average age of the

⁵ For empirical evidence that churchgoers have a stronger sense of moral order and concern for other people, see Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Identity*, 1999, p.197

general population has grown since then in line with increased longevity. But the average age of the Church has grown much faster. The most recent comparable data (2005) shows the average age of the Church is around 10.5 years older than the general population (49 and 38.5).⁶

15. The simple fact is this: unless there is a significant increase in new people joining the Church over the coming years, that there will be an accelerating decline in the overall number of worshippers.
16. Over recent decades there has been a progressive squeeze on the Church's ability to sustain a nationwide presence. Put simply, fewer clergy are now ministering to a larger population and having to oversee a roughly similar number of buildings, with fewer worshippers to pay for them. Further significant decline would make it impossible to maintain the Church of England as a national institution, which is present in every community.
17. Many of our traditional approaches to evangelism are designed to draw in those on the fringe, or those who have had previous contact with church, and yet the pool of such people is shrinking. The Church nationally needs to pioneer new approaches among the ever-increasing proportion of the population who have never had any contact with church that will awaken in them the possibility of God and help them to explore how God might be relevant to them. George Lings (of Church Army) has described the change of mission focus this requires as 'the going of "come" and the coming of "go"'. This long-term seed sowing requires more resources to help churches engage with the contemporary search for spirituality and to equip lay people to be a little more confident in talking about where God fits into their life.⁷
18. Besides becoming smaller, the Church is also at risk of becoming shallower. Declining attendance figures are in part caused by changes in the frequency of attendance – even regular and committed members are attending less often, amid the pressures of Sunday working, sport, leisure and family commitments. Alongside this, those who start attending fresh expressions of church often attend monthly rather than weekly, at least to begin with.⁸ There is some evidence of more people coming to church but less often.⁹ Less regular church attendance will lead to a 'shallower' church, unless we can find new and effective means of teaching the faith through small groups, online media or individual discipleship/mentoring for the new generations who may never match the

⁶ English Church Census figures for 1979, 1989, 1998, and 2005 compared with Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for general population from same years. It should be reiterated that, unlike the *Celebrating Diversity* figures which cover adults only, the ECC statistics cover all age groups. Hence the difference between the average age revealed by the different surveys.

⁷ See for example, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: communicating faith in a changing culture* (CHP, 2005); *Telling our Faith Story*, Janice Price (Grove Books, 2009)

⁸ Recent research by the Sheffield Centre shows that over half of fresh expressions in Liverpool and Canterbury dioceses run weekly, with the remainder less frequently. Messy Church, for example, usually meets monthly.

⁹ For example, the excess of joiners over leavers revealed in the new Statistics for Mission returns trialled by the dioceses of Leicester and Lichfield.

frequency of attendance at corporate worship of their forebears. Effective discipleship will be key to both spiritual and numerical growth.¹⁰

19. These risks are real and cannot be ignored. There will be great danger, however, if our motivation for making new disciples is a desire to preserve the Church of England, or 'to keep the show on the road'. Missiologists rightly distinguish between pure and impure motives for mission, and alert us to some of the defective motives that have driven mission in church history.¹¹ Seeking to preserve the institution of the Church is a very questionable motive for mission because it is essentially selfish – mission for the sake of the church rather than for the sake of the world or for the sake of God. As Ann Morisy comments, 'Anxiety turns us inwards and drains us of energy, so we get preoccupied with more and more analysis and dare only to tweak the structures, rather than turn outwards to practise Gospel obedience in our neighbourhoods and world.'¹²
20. A crisis in church attendance is not something new in the Church. Such was the spiritual torpor in England in the early eighteenth century, after the excesses of religious zeal in the seventeenth century, that to describe someone as an 'enthusiast' in matters of religion was for many a term of abuse. Yet over the next century, with first the Evangelical Revival and then the Oxford Movement, the spiritual life and temperature of the nation was transformed.

The heart of the issue

21. There are many different ways of diagnosing the problem of why the Church is not making and keeping enough new disciples. Many competing solutions are offered by different groups within the Church: some propose that it should give more attention and priority to apologetics or to the relationship of religion and science; others believe that a charismatic renewal is required or a rediscovery of contemplative prayer; others argue that if only the whole Church would engage in projects for justice or invest more in church schools then we would solve the problem; still others argue that it is the structures of the church or its lack of unity which impede its mission.
22. Experience suggests that some issues will always be identified as the fundamental barrier to growth as if, having solved that one problem, growth will follow automatically. This is unrealistic. Facilitating growth is a multi-faceted issue and, whilst solving the perceived barriers to growth is important, none of the proposed solutions will be sufficient in itself, and any national growth strategy will encompass all of these areas in a complex ecology of continuity and change. We do not believe that there are quick fixes for the growth of the Church.
23. However, it follows from the theological reflections above that the ultimate issue for the Church in making new disciples is a spiritual one. At the heart of the problem is the

¹⁰ New training materials for an adult catechumenate are currently being prepared by the Bishops of Chelmsford and Sheffield.

¹¹ See for example, *Contemporary Missiology*, J Verkuyl, Eerdmans, 1978, chapter 6; *Missions*, G Van Rheezen, Zondervan, 1996, pp38-43; Thangaraj, *op.cit.*, p152

¹² *Journeying Out*, Ann Morisy, Continuum, 2006

need for a transformation of the heart and its values and priorities. What is required is the ‘shift towards a dynamic missionary emphasis’ called for by the 1988 Lambeth Conference: a shift which goes ‘beyond care and nurture to proclamation and service’ and presents a challenge ‘to diocesan and local church structures and patterns of worship and ministry, and looks to God for a fresh movement of the Spirit in prayer and outgoing love and evangelism in obedience to our Lord’s command’.¹³

24. This shift, as the Resourcing Mission Group report (2006) noted¹⁴, must involve the whole Church whether ordained or lay. In the words of the Lambeth Conference Resolutions, a dynamic mission emphasis requires ‘a revolution in the attitude to the role of the laity’ which views every Christian as an agent of mission. Such a shift was indeed called for half a century earlier, in the 1945 report *Towards the Conversion of England*:

The duty of evangelism is laid upon the *whole* Church. By every means possible the clergy must be set free from all hindrances, spiritual as well as material, which prevent them from exercising an evangelistic ministry. More particularly must they be given time to fulfil their primary responsibility of training the laity for evangelism.¹⁵
25. There are already a number of activities within the Church which bring lay and ordained people together in mission and which need to be understood to play a role in a holistic approach to growth. These activities are too numerous to name-check them all, but we would draw attention here to two examples: the burgeoning Fresh Expressions movement, and the role of chaplains, in all kinds of institutions, who often function as a “shop window” for the Christian community. Both are involved in meeting and engaging with people in networks and groupings which complement parish and other geographically-based modes of mission and which are responsive to sociological and demographic change. Both find themselves somewhat on the edge of the main structures of the institutional Church.
26. The institutional Church has made a number of attempts to prioritise the making of new disciples – from *Towards the Conversion of England* (1945) to the ‘Decade of Evangelism’. However the most significant changes in the Church over history have rarely emanated from the official central structures – they usually originate on the edge where the Spirit of God inspires willing people to do things that others would not imagine or to carry on doing things that others have given up on. Examples of such movements include the formation of the Franciscan and Dominican orders in the thirteenth century, the rise of Sunday schools in the nineteenth century, or the development of process evangelism courses (such as Alpha, Emmaus and Credo) in the twentieth. Within the last decade, many of the things that are clearly helping the growth of the Church have begun as the initiative of an individual or a local church, including Back to Church Sunday and Messy Church.

¹³ Resolution 44.

¹⁴ *Resourcing Mission for a 21st Century Church*, 2006, GS Misc 810, p19.

¹⁵ *Towards the Conversion of England* (Church Assembly, 1945), p.150

27. Although central structures rarely play a part in initiating change in this area, if they are responsive to the movement of God's mission, they will help to spread and reinforce it by developing the Church's existing strengths and mainstreaming innovation. For example, during the Decade of Evangelism a diocesan missionary (or equivalent) was appointed in almost every diocese – belatedly fulfilling a recommendation made fifty years before in *Towards the Conversion of England* -and many new initiatives and ideas in making new disciples have been shared between parishes and dioceses through this network.

A Strategy for Making new Disciples

Starting and Continuing in Prayer

28. So what can help bring about this required shift towards a dynamic missionary emphasis within the Church which is focused on making new disciples? As the shift is a spiritual issue, then the starting point – and continuing need is for – prayer: both for the necessary transformation within the Church to capture the priority of making disciples and also for the effectiveness of the Church's outreach. As Archbishop William Temple said to the Commission he appointed in 1944, 'The first need in evangelism is for a strengthening and a quickening of spiritual life within the Church: "We cannot separate the evangelisation of those without from the rekindling of devotion within."'¹⁶
29. Like Paul and Apollos we can sow seeds and water them, but it is God who will make them grow (1 Cor. 3.6). Prayer for growth will include intercession and lament but also contemplation, since attentiveness to God should help us align our ideas and strategy with God's will and purpose, so that we are seeking the kind of growth God wills for his Church.
30. Focused prayer on making new disciples and encouraging growth is the highest priority. The aim is to engage as many people as possible across the Church to intercede for the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church, whether praying individually or as part of diocesan and parish prayer vigils or days of prayer.

Keeping growth high on the agenda

31. It follows from all that has been said so far that a series of top-down initiatives is unlikely to achieve much change. What is required is incremental and sustained cultural change throughout the whole Church so that the business of making new disciples influences all that it does. A key way to make that happen is to ensure that making new disciples is always part of the Church's formal and informal agendas. Too often the agendas of the Church's leaders and decision-making bodies give priority to the 'urgent over the important'. Thus there is not enough space for discussion about – and planning for - the Church's mission and growth.

¹⁶ *Towards the Conversion of England* (Church Assembly, 1945), p. ix

32. This can change if those with responsibility for the agendas of these bodies make it happen, so that priority is given to prayer and strategic work relating to Church growth, and feedback on progress. Change can be accelerated if the different bodies communicate with each other, so that there can be mutual encouragement, learning and support about Church growth. For example, a deanery or diocesan synod can take time to listen to stories about new fresh expressions of church or the progress its churches are making in relation to their Mission Action Plans and draw out the principles of best practice.
33. We propose, therefore, that the General Synod encourages diocesan bishops, as the Church's leaders in mission, to ensure church growth is regularly on the agendas of the different bodies within their diocese *and* there is good reporting within and between dioceses. General Synod itself should help facilitate such discussions by allowing time on its agenda to hear reports from dioceses about the progress of their growth plans. It should also ensure that its own Business Committee and the bodies deciding the agendas of other bodies (the House and College of Bishops, Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners) are giving adequate space to the the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church. This may require the revision of existing standing orders.
34. All such initiatives to make the Church's synods and council more 'mission-shaped' can help move it to the point where *all* Church activity is looked at through the key question – 'How will this help us to make new disciples for Jesus Christ?'

Helping the local church to grow

35. We suggest, therefore, that a national mission strategy needs to focus on spiritual and cultural transformation. However the Church, if it is to make headway with its urgent missionary task to make new disciples for Jesus Christ, must also change the way that it *does* things. It needs to ensure that:
- it is deploying its human and financial resources to facilitate its missionary task;
 - it is re-imagining its ministry to give a high profile to making new disciples;
 - it is training its clergy and laity to become more effective in making new disciples;
and
 - its legal structures and its administration give a high priority to making new disciples.
36. As the Resourcing Mission Group report said:
'Strategies to develop a more dynamic mission emphasis within the Church [require] a radical investment in the infrastructure of mission throughout the whole Church if there is to be real progress in remaking the Church for our times. A key part of the investment in mission must be in the training of the laity and clergy. The goal is to form a laity confident and skilled to make Christ known in their home, work and leisure environments. This in turn requires clergy who – as well as being evangelists

themselves – are able to envision, equip and support the laity in their work of outreach.’¹⁷

37. The Church of England is a complex organism comprising a large number of legally independent – and interdependent – units. In the Church, making new disciples and the strategy relating to it are primarily worked out at local level – in dioceses, under the leadership of the diocesan bishops, and in parishes. A key group in enabling this local work is the Mission Network which brings together the officers in virtually every diocese who have a distinctive responsibility for growth and mission, the Anglican Mission Agencies and practitioners. We believe that the Mission Network has a major role to play in making new disciples.
38. We recommend Mission Action Planning (MAP) to the Church. MAP is a tool which has helped many local churches to clarify their mission by careful listening to God and to their local communities. Based on a four-step reflective cycle of Review-Choose-Plan- Act, MAP helps a local church to discern how it can be part of God’s mission in its locality, to produce a plan for action, and to learn from its experience. Whilst simply writing a plan as a paper exercise to satisfy the diocese will not lead to growth, there is a strong correlation between churches whose leadership engage with MAP in a systematic and sustained way and those that are more likely to grow in faith and numbers. Many dioceses have now adopted MAP at diocesan level, as a way of developing their own strategic planning.¹⁸
39. Much of the growth taking place comes from churches doing their everyday worship, pastoral and community work excellently, for example through the quality of welcome, a conscious policy of integrating new people into the life of the church, through working out why people are leaving and doing something about it. Conversely, some churches which are doing these things encounter glass ceilings which prevent further growth. The dissemination of good practice and the development of appropriate training resources enables others to learn from this experience.¹⁹
40. For the last ten years the Church of England has encouraged the planting of fresh expressions of church; created especially for those who do not attend any church at present or who have not had any significant prior church experience. There has been recent evidence that this strategy has born good fruit and that fresh expressions have led to growth in the church. In Liverpool diocese there are 78 fresh expressions of church and the attendees of these equate to 10% of the diocese’s overall attendance figures. In Canterbury diocese there are 71 fresh expressions of church and the attendees of these equate to 11.6% of the attendance in the diocese as a whole. The encouragement and support of fresh expressions of church should therefore be a key part of our ongoing local, diocesan and national strategy in mission and evangelism.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid, p17.

¹⁸ Cf. *How to Do Mission Action Planning: A Vision-centred Approach*, M Chew and M Ireland, CHP, 2009

¹⁹ Cf. *Developing Healthy Churches: Returning to the heart of mission and ministry*, Robert Warren, CHP, 2012

²⁰ Unpublished reports by George Lings for the Church Army Sheffield Centre.

41. The growth of fresh expressions of church catering for children and families is a particularly heartening sign. For example, according to Bible Reading Fellowship the number of registered examples of Messy Church in England passed 1,500 in October 2012 – a remarkable growth in just eight years. Given that the vast majority of adults who come to faith have had some prolonged exposure to the Christian faith as children, and given that the decline in churchgoing among children and young people has been much steeper than that of adults, new approaches to making disciples among the young continue to be a priority.²¹ A key question for the national Church is how best to resource and equip the leaders of grassroots movements like Messy Church, so that they enable their members to grow into mature disciples of Christ. Good practice in sharing faith with children and young people is contained in the Church of England’s strategy for children and young people, *Going for Growth*. One thing bishops are able to do when they confirm is to ask specific questions of the parishes about what arrangements are in place for the on-going nurture of candidates post-confirmation.

Levers of influence

42. The Church does not have a top-down, command economy, and fresh moves of the Spirit tend to start at local level. So although we can urge all parts of the Church to be more focused on making new disciples and share their learning, it is neither possible nor wise to *demand* all parts of the Church deliver certain actions.
43. However, the Archbishops, Bishops (both as a House and individually), General Synod and National Church Institutions (NCIs) are able to influence and support dioceses, deaneries and parishes through the various levers they have at their disposal. They hold these levers either in their capacity as national leaders or because (as in the case of the NCIs) they undertake activities which are best done nationally (e.g. on the principle of subsidiarity and/or to achieve economy of scale).
44. The levers can be grouped under various headings:
- Leading by example, in prayer for growth, and in making new disciples
 - Communication (promoting vision, issuing prayer resources, spreading good practice)
 - Financial support
 - Research and development (including national mission projects)
 - Selection and training for ministry
 - Support and advice (e.g. to mission networks)
 - Creating effective structures.
45. A significant amount of national level work already meets the General Synod’s call to ‘support dioceses, deaneries and parishes in their own church growth and mission planning’. The question is how this national work should be developed further in line

²¹ Since 1970 the number of adults attending public worship in the Church of England has fallen by approximately half, whilst among children and young people the fall has been even sharper – by 80%.

with the priority of making new disciples. At Questions at the February 2012 Synod there was a clear call for the process of developing a national strategy to be opened up to the insights of practitioners on the ground – those who are seeing God’s Spirit at work in new and exciting ways. Synod members have been encouraged to send in their ideas. As part of the exchange of ideas we recommend that the Mission Network is encouraged to invite innovative responses from local churches, deaneries, diocesan secretaries, etc to the question... “What could be done differently at national level that would help you to make new disciples?” and to report through MPA on local ideas which the network members are persuaded would be fruitful.

46. In the meantime, we set out below our initial recommendations for the key areas where national work should be developed:

- a) Communicating the theological imperative for making new disciples;**
- b) Leading and encouraging prayer for spiritual and numerical growth;**
- c) Ensuring that the processes for selecting, training and deploying ministers fit with the goal of making new disciples;**
- d) Research and listening to practitioners on the ground, leading to more effective communication of good practice in making new disciples;**
- e) Developing mission experimentation across the whole Church (e.g. pushing forward the fresh expressions strategy);**
- f) Developing the use of communications (e.g. social media) as a mission tool to reach beyond geographically-based mission work;**
- g) Creating new resources to teach the faith through small groups (adult catechesis) and to equip people to advance the arguments for faith (apologetics); and**
- h) Training and equipping dioceses and parishes in the principles of making new disciples and Mission Action Planning.**

47. The next step for each of these areas of work would be to identify some ‘SMART’ goals, identifying which person or body would take lead responsibility for each area, to whom they would report, and over what timescale.

48. We look to the dioceses and NCIs to take forward these areas of work, and ensure all their work is more closely aligned with the goal of making new disciples, reallocating staff resources as necessary and ensuring close liaison between the different groups tasked with taking forward work on the three Quinquennial priorities (spiritual and numerical growth, reimagining ministry and promoting the common good) to ensure a

coherent, holistic vision. The NCIs should report regularly to General Synod on progress (using their usual channels of reporting), as part of the process of change set out in this report.

Conclusion

49. The urgent missionary task facing the Church is to make new disciples for Jesus Christ who will seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. The priority of growing the number of new believers is not for the sake of the Church itself, but to enable the Church to fulfil God's mission to be a sign, agent and foretaste of his Kingdom, where ultimately every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Turning around the decline in the number of new disciples is a massive task for the Church: far too big a task to be delegated to a small task group; way beyond what the National Church Institutions can achieve; more profound than a General Synod debate or two can fix. It will only happen if people at every level in the Church are enabled to catch the vision, pray passionately and work together.
50. Thus, we have resisted proposing a long list of top-down initiatives. That would be to misunderstand the nature of the problem and ignore the work already taking place. If there is to be greater focus within the Church on making new disciples the primary need is for *spiritual transformation* – so that we are aligned with God's mission in the world – and *cultural change* so that the business of making new disciples has the highest priority in the agendas of the Church's leaders and decision-making bodies.
51. A new direction requires spiritual and cultural change, but it also needs the structures and resources to be deployed in different ways to signal the change in direction and reinforce it. Most of the Church's decisions are undertaken at local level beyond the direct control of a national mission strategy, though it can call for better communication to ensure the different parts of the Church learn about good practice. Much national work is already serving the growth planning of parishes, deaneries and dioceses but there is potential to do more. The national Church leaders and institutions need to review this and report back to General Synod on progress.
52. The task is massive but the Church can take comfort from the fact that nothing is impossible for God. And it is to Him that we must turn if the task is to be achieved.

A prayer for the growth of the Church:

God our Creator and Redeemer, help your Church to grow in holiness, unity, effectiveness and numbers. Draw us closer to you and to those around us. Give us enthusiasm in our faith, and wisdom in sharing it with young and old. Open our eyes to new opportunities, our lips to sing and speak of you, and our hearts to welcome the stranger. Grow your kingdom in us and in the world, through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Rt Revd Dr Alan Smith, Bishop of St. Albans (Chair)

Philip Fletcher, Archbishops' Council, Chair of the Mission and Public Affairs Council

The Revd Mark Ireland, Archbishops' Council, Vicar of Wellington with Eyton

December 2012