

**GENERAL SYNOD****Simpler, Humbler, Bolder****A Church for the whole nation which is Christ centred and shaped by the Five Marks of Mission****Summary**

The purpose of this paper is to bring General Synod up to date with the development of the Church of England's vision and strategy<sup>1</sup> by:

1. Sharing again the big vision of our life in Christ and what it means to be a Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped Church.
2. Explaining how the strategy has developed since it was first shared with Synod in November 2020.
3. Inviting Synod's help in shaping the strategic actions that will help us fulfil our vision to grow the Church and enable more people to know Christ, developing narratives of hope, and making a difference in the world.
4. Sharing some considerations which have shaped the development of this vision and its longed-for implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> The central ideas of the vision emerged in 2020 from a wide-ranging series of discussions with the networks of the Church of England, including many Synod members. They were adopted by the College of Bishops and the Diocesan Secretaries of the Church of England at a meeting in September 2020, then shared with General Synod at its November 2020 meeting.

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**Part 1: A Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped Church****To glorify God, and to enjoy God forever**

1. The Prayer Book Catechism begins with questions about the candidate's understanding of their baptism, and the promises made by their godparents.
2. The fourth question is this:
 

“Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do, as they have promised for thee?”
3. The answer – which of course in previous times would have been learned by heart – was this:
 

“Yes verily; and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end.”
4. The Christian life is a life lived in community with God. It is an abundant life. Through the sacramental grace of baptism, and nourished by the Eucharist, we live as God's people, demonstrating to the world that new humanity which is given us in Christ. There are all sorts of ways, both in scripture, tradition and personal testimony, that this flourishing is expressed. But it must always be the starting point for any discussion of the Christian vision. In Christ we are set free. Christ is therefore the starting point. We live our lives in him and for him.
5. The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it famously and succinctly: “What is the chief end of man? Answer: “To glorify God, and to enjoy God forever.”
6. But there is a second starting point which follows from it. The catechism was learned by those who were going to be brought for Confirmation by the Bishop. That flourishing which is the gift of God in Christ is lived out within the community of the Church where, together, we communicate that salvation to others, live it out in our lives and through this seek to change the world.

**To witness to God's love and to work for the coming of his kingdom**

7. Referencing 1 Peter 2.9-10, 1 Corinthians 3.16 and 1 Corinthians 12.27, Common Worship ordination services in the Church of England, be it for bishops, priests or deacons, begin with these tremendous words:
 

“God calls his people to follow Christ, and forms us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation to declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the whole Church is summoned to witness to God's love and to work for the coming of his kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Common Worship, Ordination Services*, Church House Publishing, 2007, Pg. 55.

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8. This beautifully sums up our theology of the Church and our theology of ministry. In following Christ, we are enlisted in his service. All of us. We all have a part to play in God's mission of love to the world.
9. In the darkness and difficulty of our current situation, we need a renewal and reappraisal of what this means and how we live and bear the light of Christ to the world through the Church, evangelising a culture which knows little of the gospel and has only very limited experience of the Church.

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**Part 2: The development of the Vision and Strategy since November**

*“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.”*

1 Cor. 12 12-15

10. The Church is the body of Christ. Together we are the limbs and members. We all have a part to play.
11. The vision for the Church of England in the 2020s is that we become a Church that is *centred* on Jesus Christ and *shaped* by Jesus Christ through the five marks of mission.
12. This is not a new vision, but a refreshed way of describing what has always been the case.
13. At the same time, we are called to be a church for the whole nation, serving every community and every person.
14. The phrase a *Jesus shaped life* is borrowed from our sisters and brothers in the Anglican Communion and puts **the Five Marks of Mission** at the centre of our life in Christ. They describe a vocation to be the ones who **tell** the story of Jesus Christ; **teach** the faith of Jesus Christ; **tend** to the cares of the world; **transform** the unjust structure of society; and **treasure** and safeguard the integrity of God’s creation.
15. And our vision for being a Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped Church will help us focus on what truly matters: the Christ like life of prayer; our worship and our service; the proclamation of God’s good purposes for the world; and how all this is fed and nurtured by word and sacrament, and by our own humble acknowledgment of our need of God’s grace, so that, together, we can build a better, more hopeful future.
16. Flowing from this are a number of interrelated workstreams which together, we believe, will transform the Church of England, enabling us to fulfil our historic vocation of serving every inch of this country and every person in it; provide a coherent and sustainable way of moving into the future; and assist us in moving beyond the current challenges that have been exacerbated and amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrated by the financial difficulties that many dioceses are experiencing.
17. First there are the three strategic priorities which flow from the vision itself:
  - **To become a church of missionary disciples** where all God’s people are set free and empowered and enabled to live the Christian life in and for the world, shaped by the Five Marks of Mission and living a life of prayer and service. This flows from the spiritual and theological renewal at the heart of the vision; will require a renewal of worship and formation in every parish and

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church community; and will overflow with blessing, service and challenge to the world, particularly in those areas of specific need such as the environmental crisis the world faces. It will also enable us to be a more evangelistic Church, able to give a reason for the hope we have in Christ and delighting to share that with others. It will help us articulate compelling narratives of hope that speak directly to the great challenges of our time, chiefly the environmental challenge, but also issues of peace and justice, and always a heart for the poor and excluded.<sup>3</sup>

- **To become a Church where mixed ecology is the norm.** This is not a new idea. The Church that we see forming, changing and growing in the New Testament understood that as the gospel encountered new cultures, so its life and message needed to be *translated* into the language of that culture. The message of the gospel did not change, but the way it was expressed in the language of different cultures did. The success of the Church of Jesus Christ in becoming a world faith is largely due to this astonishing cultural adaptability, which itself flows from one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, namely the Incarnation. God's word is made flesh, and that God clothed his message and his purpose, in the very stuff of the creation, the person Jesus Christ, who is both fully human and fully God. At Pentecost, this blessing of diversity is made supremely evident by the fact that the whole world doesn't start to speak *one* language, but that the followers of Jesus Christ speak *every* language.

In the Church of England in the 2020s this notion of mixed ecology will be the way in which we fulfil, in our day, that historic vocation to be the church for every inch of England, and the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (as well as to witness for Christ all across the Diocese in Europe as well) and every person therein. This is not a dismantling of the parish system. Neither is it a way of disregarding or devaluing ordained ministry. However, it acknowledges that the parish system that we have inherited was the *consequence* of evangelisation, not its *cause*. It is good for serving more settled geographic communities. It is less effective in the networks of contemporary life. However, it has proved remarkably adaptable. Most of the exciting new ways of being church have arisen from parishes. Therefore, alongside parishes (and often flowing from them), we need to enable church to form in the different networks in which we live our lives. There are four areas in particular: home; work or education; social; and digital. During the pandemic we have all discovered the potential for nurturing Christian community online. But this will happen alongside what we hope will be a flourishing of church and ministry in our parishes, and in other new communities of faith through church planting, fresh expressions of church, and particularly through chaplaincy, which has always been a hugely important part of our ministry to the nation (such as in schools, hospitals, universities, HM forces and prisons) but has often been neglected when we talk about mission and ministry and decide where to put our resources. Here again there are complexities of governance, with many chaplains managed and paid by other groups with their own cultures. However, what we aim for is a mixed ecology that will enable every person in

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<sup>3</sup> The *Lament to Action* report and the Archbishops' Commission Commissions on Housing are two recent examples of the Church of England speaking into these issues today.

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England to have an accessible discipleship pathway into an enriching, compelling and accessible community of faith. This is therefore an evangelistic vision. It is a re-imagined parish ministry, taking the central vision of serving everyone and finding new ways of expressing it.

- **To become younger and more diverse.** An 80-year-old is 8 times more likely to be in church than a 20-year-old! The challenge of sharing the Christian faith with new generations is a top priority, and resource must be given to it. We also need to look like the communities we serve and ensure that diverse people are represented at every level in the church's leadership and ministry. We will set ourselves ambitious targets to make this change. This will involve a bolder commitment to Christian education and ministry with children, young people and students, creating a truly inter-generational way of working and ministering. We need to build on the vision of churches, schools and families working together in Growing Faith among, with and for children and young people. At the same time, we need a much more diverse, inclusive and reflective leadership and governance that promotes equity and justice; and draws on the lived experience and insights of the whole world, looking particularly to the Anglian Communion and prioritising the poorest and the most forgotten. This means continuing our Next Steps work within Living in Love and Faith, working with the Racial Justice Commission, and working with those living with disability.

18. Then, there are two other major pieces of work which flow from the vision:

- **To bring simplicity and coherence to our governance structures** so that the Church of England can join up the work that is currently carried by several different bodies; can enable us to make better decisions and be better able to implement them across the whole church. At the moment we are led in one way or another by a plurality of different overlapping bodies – the offices of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Archbishop of York; the General Synod; the Church Commissioners; the House of Bishops; the Diocesan Bishops; and the Archbishops' Council. And all this serves 42 independent dioceses, innumerable chaplaincies and fresh expressions, and 16,000 parishes. All this needs to be simplified. Although this process is not finance led, it may well lead to financial saving. But the aim is to bring spiritual and theological renewal into all our decision making, giving clarity of decision-making and proper ownership of those decisions by those who take them.

*The Bishop of Leeds is chairing a Governance Review Group to take this work forward, which is due to make recommendations in 2021.*

- **To use our resources of people, structures, historic wealth and processes more effectively in the service of our vocation and the *missio dei*.** This is another area where simplification, humility, clarity and boldness are urgently needed. In order to ensure that wherever possible our resources flow towards supporting frontline ministry, and fully using the potential of modern technology, we must simplify our life, only doing at the centre what absolutely must be or is best done one or fewer times, avoiding duplication wherever possible, even beginning to think about whether dividing the Church into 42 dioceses is the best way of managing our life. Do we need the current number of bishops? Do we need a different kind of bishop, ministering in

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different missional contexts? There is already great scope for dioceses to share back office functions. We may need to go further and encourage dioceses to explore working together in other ways and possibly even uniting.

*Some of this work is being handled through the Transforming Effectiveness workstream, chaired by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. This is the subject of a separate General Synod paper in this group of sessions.*

*The Mutuality in Finance Group, chaired by the Bishop of Sheffield, is looking at historic differences in wealth and resource between dioceses. This is also the subject of a separate General Synod paper in this group of sessions.*

*The Dioceses Commission, under the leadership of its new chair Dame Caroline Spelman, will be asked to look at future patterns of episcopal oversight including questions of diocesan organisation and configuration, drawing on work done by the Bishop of Ely, Maggie Swinson and Mark Sheard on behalf of the Archbishops.*

19. All this Vision and Strategy work is overseen by a Steering Group chaired by the Bishop of Manchester.
20. Finally, none of this will happen if we don't find a way of becoming financially sustainable. Finance does not make for good church but lack of it can destroy good ideas. This sustainability will either happen by letting market forces prevail – the weak go to the wall, wealthy suburban parishes surviving and everything else falling away – **or it will happen because coherent governance structures and clear vision enable us to find a way of sharing resources so that the Church can be sustained and flourish across the whole of the nation and by all the different streams of the Church.**
21. Some of the initiatives described above will create financial savings and this will enable more money to go to frontline ministry.
22. We will need to constantly review how we best use the gifts from the wealth of the past that are held for us by the Church Commissioners, and we will need to do so in the light of the priorities emerging from the Vision and Strategy as we look forward into 2022 and beyond.
23. We must acknowledge that some of our so-called central costs are mandatory and unavoidable, such as providing housing for the clergy or safeguarding. To stop doing any of these things would elicit a short-term saving but lead to long-term disaster and only increase the burden on already hard-pressed parish clergy and officers. However, part of the Transforming Effectiveness agenda is to raise the question of those costs which are *not* mandatory and see what things may have to be cut at the centre or in the dioceses shared more efficiently.
24. Ironically, there has been some talk in the press about why the Church of England is cutting clergy numbers but not cutting red tape, not cutting the number of bishops, and not looking at other matters. Paradoxically, it is these things we *have* been looking at, and clergy numbers, as should be well known, is a decision for individual dioceses. Our vision suggests we need more leaders and not less, and we will need to look creatively at how we plan for this.
25. However, the chief aim of all this work is to provide a sustainable future for the Church of England whereby we can continue to fulfil our historic vocation, which

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in turn requires us to do all that we can to make sure all our resources are focused on the single end of serving our nation by ensuring that Christ is made known, and we, his followers, express our lives in prayer and service.

26. For this to happen we need priest and people working together. We need the input and wisdom of General Synod. We need to become an efficient and effective church. The single purpose is to make Christ known through the ministry of the Church of England.
27. **What is shared here, therefore, is the whole story of our whole ambition, and we invite the whole Church of England to share with us in this work of renewal as we re-centre our lives on Christ, of truly working together as the Body of Christ, and of finding the way forward that will best serve our nation.**
28. As we have developed this work, three words have emerged, and they have dotted their way through this paper: **simpler, humbler and bolder**.
- A simpler Church, both in governance and structure, and in the way we live and share the gospel.
  - A humbler Church, recognising our failings and working with others to serve the common good.
  - A bolder Church, energised and enthused by the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ, sharing that with everyone and making a difference in the world.



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**Part 3 : Shaping and developing the strategic priorities**

29. Here is the Vision and Strategy in its most succinct summary:

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One vision: **A Church for the whole nation which is Jesus Christ centred, and shaped by the five marks of mission**

**Leading to three strategic priorities for the 2020s:**

- 1) A church of missionary disciples
- 2) A church where mixed ecology is the norm
- 3) A church which is younger and more diverse

From these priorities we have identified:

**Six bold outcomes**

*A church for everyone through:*

- 1) Doubling the number of children and young active disciples in the Church of England by 2030.
- 2) A Church of England which fully represents the communities we serve in age and diversity.
- 3) A parish system revitalised for mission so there is a pathway for every person into an accessible and contextual expression of church.
- 4) Creating ten thousand new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital.

*Empowered by:*

- 5) All Christians in the Church of England envisioned, resourced and released to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the whole of life, bringing transformation to the church and world.
- 6) All local churches, supported by their diocese, becoming communities and hubs for initial and ongoing formation.

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**30. So, what are the key actions we need to take together to get us to these outcomes? Here are some examples of the actions suggested. Do these look the right kind of actions?**

- a) We believe God is calling us towards a revitalised parish system within which new and inherited worshipping communities flourish together. We

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see this in diocesan plans, which already plan for 3,500 new worshipping communities, and in releasing and enabling the vision of networks and individuals across the church. We think this could result in 10,000 new communities starting by 2030, reaching people in all spheres of their life – home and local community, work and education, social and digital. To do this would mean that **most churches and all dioceses would start something new to reach people in their contexts.**

- b) **We believe that God may be calling us to develop up to 3,000 churches across England to be worshipping hubs for children and young people**, with more than 25 young people worshipping in each. We are saddened by the fact that only 900 churches fulfil this right now. We see the motion made by Synod in February 2019 on youth evangelism as the part of this calling and that as we become younger, this will help us become more diverse in many aspects.
- c) We believe that God is calling us to **significantly increase and build our leadership capacity for a younger and mixed ecology church.** We already see this vision emerging in the significant increase in vocations to ordained leadership over recent years. The fruits of this will be seen in those who will leave training between now and 2030. We sense we need a bold calling of lay leaders in their thousands to complement this movement, particularly in ministry with young people.
- d) We believe that we need **significant change across our decision-making bodies and processes to increase representation of the diversity of the communities** we lead and serve. And that this starts with the election of a new Synod in November 2021.

### 31. Questions for Synod

- 1) What are the key actions the Church of England needs to take nationally and in the dioceses in order to get us to the three strategic outcomes of being a church of missionary disciples; a church where mixed ecology is the norm; and a church which is younger and more diverse?
- 2) How might these ideas and objectives shape and influence strategic planning in your diocese, deanery, parish or other sphere of ministry?

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**Part 4: Some concluding considerations**

32. Any strategy for the Church of England needs to be for two purposes:

- To help us decide what we do and what we don't do, where we put our resource and how we organise our life in Christ. The National Church in its synodical structures and National Church Institutions will need to work out the implementation of this.
- To support, encourage and impact diocesan strategies, recognising that however the Governance Review helps us to streamline our decision-making processes, the Church of England is not a centrally run organisation and that what is done nationally is to *better facilitate the work of the church in the dioceses*, just as the diocese is serving the local church in its parishes, church plants, fresh expressions and chaplaincies.

33. In other words, the vision and strategy is not an imposition on the dioceses and parishes of the Church of England but an invitation to examine, develop and maybe even change existing strategies and processes in the light of these ideas.

34. We hope the church in the parishes and dioceses will be shaped and informed by these ideas, supported by the work of the National Church Institutions.

35. We aim for alignment.

36. Then there are these ten things which must be constantly kept in mind:

- 1) The clergy, stipendiary and self-supporting, and the lay leadership of the Church of England are among our greatest resource. Our plans need to support them in their ministry and help them to decide how and where they put their time and energies. We will continue to work and pray for an increase in vocations to ordained ministry and licensed and authorised lay ministry.
- 2) There is a lot of tiredness in the church. We have had lots of initiatives. They have not always been well received. Neither have they always been particularly effective. It is very likely that the COVID-19 crisis has increased this sense of weariness. We need to avoid this vision and strategy appearing as 'one more initiative'. Rather, it is a resetting of the compass around our basic vocation to follow Christ and to make Christ known. Its implications will be worked out over the next ten years.
- 3) The decline that the Church of England has experienced over a long period of time is not simply a result of failure. We cannot simply say, if only we had different strategies, better plans (and better bishops), all would be well. We have undoubtedly failed many times. There are things we should have done differently. But it would be foolish to ignore the huge shift in the tectonic plates of European and world culture that have shaped the world in which we serve and witness. Similarly, it would be disastrously foolish to ignore God. Whatever strategies we develop need to begin with and flow from a profound spiritual renewal and a greater waiting upon God.
- 4) Anything we recommend must be to help equip Christian people for a life of witness and service *in the world*. In particular, it must help the church

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and the nation face the key issues of our time, including the environmental crisis, racial justice and social inequality.

- 5) It must be for everyone, but with a particular emphasis on work with children and young people, and fully utilise the resource and opportunity of our church schools.
- 6) It must be conceived and communicated in and through the digital world we now inhabit. We must become a digital church with a digital vision and ethic which will be for the rest of the world as much as for us. This doesn't mean stopping being a church which gathers physically, nor does it undermine the importance of sacred space and place. But it does mean that digital can no longer be an after-thought or an add-on.
- 7) It must encompass the theological, ecclesial, sociological, and ethnographical diversity of the Church of England.
- 8) Some other things the Church of England is currently doing will have to stop to make room for this re-orientation and some work will need to be redefined and refocused as a consequence of this shift.
- 9) A Christ centred ecclesiology must be our centre. This leads us into God the Trinity. It keeps us close to Jesus, our Saviour and our friend, the author and architect of our faith. It means we will love the things that Jesus loves: the poor; the marginalised; the excluded. It means we will want to share our faith with others and see our faith make a difference in the world. It is a vision for evangelism and for the justice of the kingdom.
- 10) Even though we face huge financial challenges and must respond to these, in terms of our mission it is not downward sloping graphs, or burning platforms or melting icebergs that motivate us. Yes, we need to recognise these realities, and be challenged by them. But our motivation is the vision of the abundant life we have in Christ and a desire to share that with everyone, and to live it joyfully. That is the purpose we serve.