

Renewal and Reform



A summary of progress and impact



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“In obedience to the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples, the Church’s vocation is to proclaim the good news afresh in each generation” – the opening words of the Archbishops presenting Renewal and Reform to General Synod in 2015.

Six years ago, Renewal and Reform was presented to General Synod. As we move into the vision for the 2020s, it is timely to review what Renewal and Reform set out to do, to reflect on changes and impact over the last six years, and to see how this provides a strong foundation for our emerging vision and strategy.

GS 2038, ‘A vision for Renewal and Reform’, stated: “One of the clear and intended outcomes of this work is to reverse the decline of the Church of England so that we become a growing church, in every region and for every generation; a church open to and for everyone in England, building up the Body of Christ and working for the common good; a confident Church, equipping new generations of leaders, ordained and lay, for ministry and mission; a serving church where all God’s people live out their vocation to serve and to witness. That is our aim.”

Renewal and Reform was not based on a prescription of what every church should be, nor did it represent a single Church of England strategy or intend to describe the whole of the Church of England’s work. The stated vision was prayerfully to build on our rich inheritance to:

- Grow disciples in every place who are committed to conforming their own lives to the pattern of Christ and confident in sharing their faith with others and making Christ known.
- Call more clergy and lay leaders into a wider variety of ministries.
- Re-direct money to where it is most needed and makes the most difference.
- Foster a range of creative and imaginative mission projects which both strengthen our inheritance and open up new possibilities.
- Simplify rules and procedures to support and enable rather than inhibit.
- Give renewed voice and hope to the people of God and the communities they serve.

But what has this meant in practice since then? We can describe this in words, but the real impact is in the stories from local churches, from people impacted and making an impact where they are. The pictures we share are from just a few of the people who have been part of these stories of change – voices of hope and renewal from the people of God and the communities they serve. And there will be many more stories, many untold, that those reading this brief review will know.



Growing disciples in every place - Setting God's People Free (GS 2056), brought to Synod in February 2017, is an umbrella term to describe the twin goals of:

- Equipping all people to find and follow God confidently in every part of life, and
- Recognising the gifts and callings of all people, both clergy and lay, and encouraging all people to use these skills for the good of God's Kingdom.

We think about both the **'gathered'** church (that meets during a service, home group or other church activity) and the **'sent'** church (the body of the church in the community: at home, in service, and at rest). Within this there are three areas: community witness and service projects through the local church and networks, faith in everyday life as the Church sent in God's mission to God's world, and collaborative leadership and ministry.

The majority of dioceses have participated in the two culture shifts called for in the Feb 2017 report, and some have made the language of **Everyday Faith** core to their vision and strategy. The next phase is to move towards understanding impact in local communities demonstrated through pilot church communities and to see the impact on the flourishing of the church and evangelisation (See GS 2145). Over 350 worshipping communities participated in pilot activities in the 33 dioceses who formed the learning communities. These dioceses are now expanding the approaches they have identified for their contexts as part of the strategic support of discipleship in the whole of life. To support this, we have developed tools and a digital hub for everyday faith to support individuals and churches in living out faith in their everyday life.

The second shift called for relates to mutuality in calling and vocation. Two areas of work have been instrumental in this. The Ministry Team, together with the Setting God's People Free team, worked with the Faith and Order Commission to provide a holistic picture of calling in *Kingdom Calling* (GS Misc 1254), published in 2019. This has started to bring a shared language to vocation for discipleship and ministry. The Ministry Council has also adopted new criteria that reframes ministry roles to place the task of enabling the mission and ministry of the whole people of God as a key requirement in discernment and formation. A similar pattern for lay ministry roles is being developed.

We prayed that **increasing numbers would be called into a variety of ministries** and set what seemed a very ambitious hope and prayer of 50% increase in numbers called to ordained ministry, anticipating the significant number of clergy due to retire in the coming decade. Work to establish a baseline to understand the nature and growth of lay ministry, working towards an ambitious approach to vocations in lay ministry in churches, was completed.

“I offer care to the community. It's because of my faith that I started my job. I felt God telling me what the next job would be. He's always been very specific! When it's time to move onto the next person, he gives me the next name. I feel he's telling me what to do. That's how I approach work. I lean on God the whole time.

“I talk to people about faith all the time, and to their families, because I sense that God has sent me there. They are under no illusions about who I am, or whose I am. I talk about how God orders my steps, how he makes the load a whole lot lighter.”

Hazel, carer



“While I was doing the Church of England’s Ministry Experience Scheme placement, the vicar called me into his office. He said, “I feel like God has asked us and the local diocese to support you with starting a church.” I went mad and started shouting. “You just asked a 21-year-old to start a church, you must be crazy!”

Despite Wole’s initial response, he opened IMPRINT Leicester – a predominantly student church – in October 2017.

“People heard our stories, heard that they can meet God in brokenness. More started coming. When I look around now, it’s a collection of friendship groups where people have encountered God for themselves. Then they invite their friends, because if you have something this good, why wouldn’t you share it?”

Wole, church leader

- By summer 2021, stipendiary ordinations will have increased by 43% compared with 2013. 2019-20 saw the highest number of recommendations to ordained ministry in 25 years. Conceivably we may reach the full 50% growth in the next two to three years. The actual size of the stipendiary clergy cohort already exceeds the original projections based on 50% growth for the end of 2020 (7,400 compared with a projected 7,200 FTE)
- Of those candidates recommended to train for ordination in 2020, 54% were women for the second year running, up from 48% in 2016 (and 50% of candidates recommended for incumbent level ministry were women). 10% of recommended candidates in 2020 were of UKME heritage, up from 4% in 2016. The proportion of young adults (under 32) recommended to train has remained consistent at around a third of stipendiary candidates and work is underway to benchmark and measure our representation in terms of social diversity. In 2020, 32 candidates for Ordained Pioneer Ministry were recommended to train – a fivefold increase in five years. The cohort size of the nationally supported Ministry Experience Scheme almost doubled from 63 participants in 2016 to 113 in 2019. The current cohort is still 100 participants despite the challenges of the pandemic in establishing community, with 50% women and over 20% of UKME heritage. The National Mentoring Directory has been established and we ended 2020 with around 90 trained mentors available to support candidates from under-represented groups – a threefold increase from the start of the year.
- In the light of the growing numbers of vocations, Strategic Ministry Funding was introduced in 2020, supporting dioceses in funding additional curacies. To date this has enabled the church to fund 160 additional curates in 30 dioceses. The Church continues to wrestle with the challenges of ensuring we deploy people in the places they are most needed and will minister most fruitfully.
- For the first time we identified the scale and scope of publicly recognised lay ministry roles within the church within the church identifying over 40 different roles with well over 100,000 people carrying out these roles. This work will help the church to consider how to encourage vocations to lay ministries in the future and better celebrate and support those already working in these roles.



In parallel, a significant shift was made in relation to **discerning and nurturing future leaders**. Over 90% of bishops and deans have participated in various programmes to equip them, focused on their leadership in changing contexts and benefitted from coaching and smaller group learning. They have valued the stimulation, reflection and call to action provided and the connection with other initiatives such as the work of the Strategic Investment Board and the revised Cathedrals Measure, which have provided structures and mechanisms to help turn vision into delivery. Leaders continue to face fresh challenges as they steward the Church into an emerging future, work collectively to enable change and navigate the current complexities. The Development and Appointments Group (DAG) continues to refresh programmes and interventions for them and their teams.

The 222 people who either have participated or are participating in the Strategic Leadership Development Programme (SLDP) have contributed to many elements of Renewal and Reform through their strategic work, joining advisory groups and thinking deeply on areas including post-industrial contexts, engagement with higher education, learning from black majority churches, targeting of funding and mid-sized churches. The last five years have also seen an increased emphasis on effective implementation and accountability through peer review and learning communities. There has been focus on ensuring wide participation in this programme and the most recent cohort includes 49% women, 13% have indicated they are from a minority ethnic background and 4% have recorded a disability. Work is progressing on encouraging wider involvement of ethnic minority clergy in cathedral leadership and in applying for archidiaconal roles.

As the report *Resourcing the Future* proposed, the Church moved from a general funding approach to intentional funding to **support dioceses' investment in the growth of the Church, in particular with young people and through increased investment in deprived contexts**. From 2017-2020, £100m has been distributed through Lowest Income Communities Funding, with the sole aim of supporting ministry in the most deprived contexts. £148m has been awarded through Strategic Development Funding (SDF) to 37 dioceses. 42% focused on young people and 38% were in deprived contexts. In 2020 the criteria for SDF were further focused on these two areas. To date, this work has seen:

- Plans developed by dioceses to bring to faith over 68,000 new disciples through a mixture of revitalised ministry in existing churches and new worshipping communities, with over 11,500 new disciples reported in December 2020.

“The estates are one of the more socially and economically challenged part of the country and if we are not present in vital ways in the estates, then we have lost the gospel of Jesus' heart for people in situations in poverty, which was so much at the heart of his life and message.

“Everybody is our sister and brother, especially those who are in more challenging situations. So it is important that the church is there, helping people.”

Andy, former Chair of the National Estates Network and Canon Missioner, Birmingham Cathedral.

£148m has been awarded through Strategic Development Funding (SDF) to 37 dioceses. 42% focused on young people and 38% were in deprived contexts.

- Over 100 new worshipping communities established across the country, including some of the most deprived communities and towns (Blackpool, Gateshead, Margate, Middlesbrough Telford, Rotherham, and Wisbech), as part of redirecting money to where it is most needed and makes the most difference.
- 530 additional ordained and lay ministry posts and 170 interns and apprentices. Strategic Development Funding has encouraged and supported increasing diocesan investment in support roles which have helped raise both diocesan and local capacity to deliver strategic change projects.
- Fostered a range of creative and imaginative mission projects emerging from diocesan strategies across a wide range of contexts – such as turnaround and interim ministry; ways of growing the church in deprived areas; how to reach people in their 20s-40s; strengthening mission to children at key points of transition in their school life and how schools and churches can work together to deliver discipleship; and new forms of mission in areas with high ethnic diversity.
- And the Church has heard and responded to a renewed call to support and enable ministry in deprived communities, particularly outer urban estates (GS 2122), redirecting money through Lowest Income Communities Funding and Strategic Development Funding to where it is most needed.
- Above all, demonstrating that decline in attendance can be reversed through well-founded, prayerful approaches in areas and among demographic sectors where church attendance is lowest. But of course, this has not led to significant growth in numbers, depth of discipleship and impact in communities in totality across the Church of England: it has merely shown what could be possible. Based on the current trajectory, more than 20% of worshippers in the next five years could be in churches revitalised and renewed with local and national investment over the last six years.

More recently, in response to ongoing development of diocesan plans, two new sources of funding were introduced. Transformation Funding is supporting dioceses working on holistic mission and ministry plans across a diocese. Innovation Funding was put on hold during the pandemic but is due to be launched in 2021 and will represent a flexible and agile source of funding enabling new ideas to be tested.

A **creative and imaginative project**, which challenged widespread perceptions that the Church of England had missed the moment on digital, was the investment made in October 2016 to build **digital** capability, engaging with people who are open to or exploring faith, as well as providing resources for regular churchgoers and support for leaders. Nationally this has meant:

- Transforming the four national websites to being audience-focused, resulting in significant uplifts in traffic from both regular churchgoers and those exploring the Christian faith. For example, in 2020 there were 80 million views on AChurchNearYou.com – a site specifically aiming to connect people with their local worshipping community.
- Campaigns and resources at key moments in both the Christian and secular year. In 2020 the *Comfort and Joy* resources were seen 35.7 million times, up from 12.6 million in 2019. In addition, the campaign email list has grown from 0 two years ago to nearly 50,000.
- Sharing weekly online services that have been watched more than 3.5 million times so far, which are watched by people across the age ranges and by occasional churchgoers as well as those who have never been before.
- Critical to the plans has been encouraging and enabling local churches to embrace the web and social media to share the good news of Jesus Christ with a range of audiences, and this work has accelerated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We have resourced training for clergy and lay leaders, with 7,205 participants to date, as well as a range of regular resources and blogs about using the web and social media locally.

General Synod has simplified rules and procedures to support and enable rather than inhibit, creating increased flexibility within existing frameworks. The 2020 church representation rules have potential to free up time for hard-pressed local church communities. The online service register will enable churches to keep records electronically and automate much statistical collection. The original report to Synod on Simplification said, “*We believe, however, that the recommended changes are only a first step in the simplification which is necessary to give the Church the flexibility it needs for the urgent missionary task*”. And local church communities and dioceses have highlighted how much more simplification we need to enable mission. A number of areas have been prioritised for Legislative Reform and will be brought to General Synod in the coming months and year.



“I started on the Lent programme. I did it online and I read the booklet. From there, I did the Easter programme and Thy Kingdom Come. For 91 days there was daily feeding which was fantastic for me.

“It’s fantastic having the love of God in my life. I feel loved now. There is a calmness in my life now that maybe wasn’t there before and I’m growing in confidence too.”

Pat



“I will be honest and say that I have been on a rollercoaster with my faith. But the last three years have definitely shaped me.”

“I work with young people because this is the age when they are being built. It can change the rest of their lives. I feel strongly that you can take a child from a broken home where society thinks they are nothing, but God wants to target them and help them.”

Petra, youth volunteer

There were significant gaps: engagement and priority of young people was insufficient, and young people were not a core part of Renewal and Reform at the outset. Latterly this was addressed by making young people a priority within SDF applications and through the initiation of the **Growing Faith** adventure (GS 2121), seeking to transform ministry with young people through a holistic view of school, home and church all growing the faith of young people. It is intended that this work continues to flourish as we seek to become younger and more diverse.

Future work identified as critical to Renewal and Reform included **strategic work on buildings**, which is being led by the Strategic Buildings Group and highlighted through the work of the Emerging Church of England on Transforming Effectiveness, and a renewed focus on giving and generosity now being rolled out through the **National Giving Strategy**. Both are at relatively early stages but have potential for significant impact.

During 2020, all the areas above were reviewed and the conclusions, which were shared with all those involved in the Vision and Strategy development, were that:

- Grounded in prayerful and ambitious diocesan plans, we are seeing emergent potential for growth and renewal on a wider scale as new people are reached with the Gospel.
- Real challenges remain about our reach in specific places, age groups and ethnicities. Neither our leadership nor those who are part of our worshipping communities yet reflect those we seek to serve across England.
- The very real challenges of complex governance, financial weakness and a lack of shared vision impede the Church as a whole in working together for the change we need to proclaim the good news afresh in this generation.

There are some hallmarks of the last six years that have impacted the Church, some overtly, some more subtly.

- Challenge and debate have sharpened the language of growth to ensure it truly reflects spiritual and numerical growth: growth in numbers of disciples, growth in depth of discipleship and growth in community impact. **We are a church more focused on growth than six years ago**, and we are clear that there is no single model for growth. It can come in different contexts and draws on different traditions; but all growth requires God's grace and, on our part, intentionality, planning, deliberation, prayer and investment of time, energy and resources.
- Intentionality is an overused word, but it has been important as **we have re-directed money to where it is most needed and makes the most difference** nationally and locally. But this has not been without pain, difficult conversations, and prayerful decisions. It has also been intentionality which has brought much joy as we see increasing numbers, younger and more diverse, called to leadership roles within the church, and we see thousands upon thousands engaging with church online, even before the pandemic made this normal.
- There has been an inspiring range of creative and imaginative mission projects which both strengthen our inheritance and open up new possibilities – from the local leadership programme to national discernment, from missional youth churches to intergenerational missionaries, from youth ministers to intercultural worshipping communities, from small-to-small church planting to large resource churches, from digital to faith at home. We have seen churches reopened that were closed, and churches started where there were none. But, above all, **we have seen people come to know the love of Jesus Christ afresh or for the first time.**
- Investment in new and revived churches can make a difference, and in some parts of the country really has done so. But the real difference will come when alongside this we also have revival and missional activity in the bulk of our existing churches – hence the **ongoing importance of growing disciples in every place** who are committed to conforming their own lives to the pattern of Christ and who are confident in making Christ known and sharing their faith with others.

In obedience to the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples, the Church's vocation is to "proclaim the good news afresh in each generation". Under the umbrella of Renewal and Reform, this work sought to enable that Church's vocation, and to give renewed voice and hope to the people of God and the communities they serve: becoming a church growing in numbers, discipleship and depth of community impact – a growing Church for all people and places. This work has provided the springboard for many of the central elements of the emerging vision and strategy – we have learnt that being bolder makes a difference, that we need to be yet simpler and the learning harnessed through R&R programmes will be deeply drawn on as we move forward humbly with the same prayer as we have used throughout the programme.

A Lutheran Prayer for Courage

*Lord God,
you have called your servants
to ventures of which we cannot see
the ending,
by paths as yet untrodden,
through perils unknown.*

*Give us faith to go out
with good courage,
not knowing where we go,
but only that your hand is leading us
and your love supporting us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

Just some of the many places which have seen investment in reaching new people with the good news the last six years

