

Living Christ's Story — A refreshed vision for the Diocese of York

Edited from the Archbishop of York's Presidential Address to York Diocesan Synod, 28 November 2020

'There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.' (John 21.25)

'You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.' (2 Corinthians 3.2-3)



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As the church of Jesus Christ we have two stories to tell: the story of Jesus's life, death and resurrection; and the continuing story of what Jesus has done through his church, including what he is doing in our lives now by the power of the Spirit. That's **Living Christ's Story**.

Could it be that this understanding of ourselves as people who are called to be part of the story of God's love, living and sharing that story with others, might draw us together, give fresh impetus to our mission, and enable us to find other new and inspiring ways to share the story with others?

This is a time to celebrate all the good things that are happening in this Diocese of York, and to breathe new life into our vision.

For the last few years we've been speaking in terms of our goals, to

- Reach people we currently don't
- Move to growth
- Establish sustainable giving

But 'sustainable' could be heard as keeping things as they are, and if we think for a moment, we'll realise that some things need to be different. Church life – ministry and mission – are evolving, and we can expect for example that in the future there will be a bigger emphasis on lay and volunteer ministries, and an online presence. We're learning new insights through the nationally-supported *Multiply* and *Mustard Seed* initiatives, growing new worshipping communities, and identifying and resourcing people for new kinds of ministries.



realistic

We have to be realistic about our financial situation. Since Free Will Offer was introduced, the total amount given by parishes – whilst there have been examples of much generosity – has remained flat, and not kept pace with inflation. Support for our

general costs from the national church has been tapering down. We've managed by under-investing in some of the initiatives we'd want to take. It can't be emphasised enough that giving fresh impetus to our vision absolutely isn't all about money, but we do need to *transform* our diocesan finances – income and expenditure – in order to be the diocese, active in mission, that we want to be.

We're called to be *Christ-centred* – inspired by God's saving love that we see in Jesus Christ – and *Jesus shaped*, forming our lives on him as our example.

It would be good to see our diocese developing into:

- a church of **missionary disciples**, that is a church shaped by the five marks of mission ('tell, teach, tend, transform, treasure');
- a church where **mixed ecology** is the norm, that is a church that is better able to serve the huge variety of cultures that make up English life today by finding many different expressions. All of this will flow from healthy, flourishing parish ministry. But it will embrace digital; and, we hope, that many other types of church will flourish, not least chaplaincy;
- a church that is **younger and more diverse**.

None of this works or makes sense, unless it inspires, shapes and informs the life of the church in our parishes, church plants, chaplaincies, fresh expressions, *Multiply* and *Mustard Seed* ministries, messy church, refugee ministry, church schools, food banks and in whatever other ways we live and share the gospel in this Diocese of York. We shall have a clear commitment to people and communities living with deprivation. And, amazingly, even in this most difficult of years, in every community in our land we continue to offer prayer and service, the prayer and service that flows from our life in Christ and the ways in which Jesus has shaped our lives. This is the hope and the vision we must share with our world: the story of what God has done and is doing in Christ.

Our task as the people of God, here and now, is to share the story of Christ by letting God write that story on our own hearts and by writing the next chapter of all that Jesus is going to do here. This is about church being **simpler** in our systems and structures to serve our mission; **humbler** because we must acknowledge our failures and live within our means; and **bolder** because the things entrusted to us in Christ are what the world needs.

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So, putting all that vision together, here is a way that we can 're-boot' our diocesan goals:

1. **Becoming more like Christ** – which means receiving and knowing the story ourselves. Before we do anything else we remember who we are: God's beloved children, those whom he came to seek and save. We also remember that we know this story by prayer and service as well as by Bible study and learning. This is demanding life-changing, and it happens by God's grace alone working with us and through us. Without this foundation, nothing else makes sense.
2. **Reaching people we currently don't** – by living and telling this story, remembering that the story we share is those two stories of what God has done in Christ and what God is doing through the Church down through the centuries and in us.
3. **Growing churches of missionary disciples** - which will be the best way of reaching new people and is the way we'll grow those we reach, but also to strive to be younger and more diverse and to move towards becoming a mixed ecology church. In every community we want our churches to be places where the story of Christ is known and lived out, and where we let those stories lead us in the ways we have seen in the Mustard Seed and Multiply initiatives.
4. **Transforming our finances and structures** so that together we can support a presence in all the neighbourhoods and networks of the diocese – to find a new story that will not just be about sustaining our life, but recognising that our life needs to be transformed in order to be an agent of God's transformation in the world.

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During the first part of 2021, the bishops and archdeacons will meet with Deanery Leadership Teams to begin a consultation about how we can apply this 're-booted' vision at a local level and take it forward. Parishes will also be receiving a letter of invitation to take part, and the material will be available on the diocesan website.

'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.' (Ephesians 4.1-6)

www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/living-christs-story

