

## **“Resourcing Sustainable Church”: A Summary of the Draft Proposals**

‘Resourcing Sustainable Church’ is our Diocesan response, formed in consultation with over 500 people over the last 15 months, both to the reality of our current financial position - an unsustainable annual budget deficit of over 3 million pounds a year - and our deep desire to respond better to the mission context we find ourselves in today: a changing society and a world that is still reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic. As we work together to become a healthy, vibrant, sustainable church, serving every part of Greater Lincolnshire with the transforming message of Jesus, our task is as it always was, but we know that in order to achieve it, we have to change: together.

The proposals for “Resourcing Sustainable Church” address five main areas of diocesan life affecting our sustainability – both missionally and financially: the pattern of our ministerial deployment (where and how our lay and ordained ministers work); our ability to contribute parish share; our central costs; our historic assets; and our possibilities for growth.

They are still a work in progress, that will be developed and refined over the next weeks through the consultations we are holding. But we are confident that they make sense, that they are doable; and that they provide a way forward for us as a diocesan family, to be faithful in our worship, confident in our discipleship and joyful in our service: together.

### **Proposals for Ministerial Deployment**

The proposals for deployment set a vision for a collaborative way of working. We suggest ministry will be delivered through what we call Local Mission Partnerships (LMPs; previous working title Local Ecclesial Areas), which are groups of churches and parishes covenanting to work together in locally discerned ways, within an agreed diocesan framework. There will be collaboration between incumbents and between clergy and lay ministers, in order to reduce isolation, to increase wellbeing, and to encourage creative, effective ministry through the sharing of planning, gifts, and experience. We are not expecting to see immediate wide-scale parish reorganisation, and to begin with we envisage that these working arrangements will be local agreements rather than legal arrangements, but many ways forward are possible. For collaborative mission and ministry to flourish, we are suggesting it may well be good for each LMP to have at least 3 stipendiary posts.

We see LMPs sitting within what we are calling Deanery Partnerships (DPs; previous working title Greater Ecclesial Areas): roughly, 9 proposed groupings of existing deaneries reflecting the 9 Local authority Areas that exist across the diocese. Again, we are not expecting DPs to be legal structures in the first instance, but we hope they will provide a helpful framework to offer wisdom, guidance and leadership as LMPs are set-up. We see Rural Deans and Lay Chairs from each DP, along with the archdeacons and the bishops, supporting the process of local consultation which will feed into decisions for the DP such as: Which parishes form part of which DP? How many and where are ministers deployed within this DP as part of LMPs? What are to be the structures of these LMPs, and the roles and types of the different churches within them?

As part of this new way of working we recognise that not all churches are the same and can focus on the same things. God encourages variety! So, we are hoping that each church will complete a process of self-reflection to discern the type of church it might be for its wider area, how this connects with other churches in its LMP and how this might affect how we then work together? The aim is to make the best use of all the rich ministerial resource, both clergy and lay, that is available to us. We see a mixture of what we are calling Key Mission Churches, Local Mission Churches, Community Churches, and Festival Churches, all working together for the good of the communities they are there to serve

We recognise that this way of working more collaboratively across wider areas and with different churches in different ways may feel challenging for many of us. But we believe it is a model which will help us become sustainable as a diocese. We also believe that it may well help us to become more effective missionally at this point in time.

We realise these proposals have not given a direct answer to the question “What will happen to my church, my priest and my area?” You will also note we do not give an answer to “How many stipendiary priests will we have by 2025?” This is because it is our own individual response to the proposals which will determine this – we can each make a difference. In our thinking we have so far worked on models of 80 stipends (based on 2020 income levels), 90 stipends (based on 2019 income levels), or 100 stipends (based on an aim for increased income). Ultimately it is the decisions which we make locally that will determine these eventual numbers.

## **Proposals for Parish Share**

We are suggesting that the current formula-based system of parish share allocation will be replaced by an approach that involves what we are calling Covenant Giving. Just as individual Christians pledge to give to their churches, so too local churches will prayerfully pledge a financial contribution to support their local ministry costs. The money raised through parish share will help pay for the stipends, national insurance, pension and housing of the paid parish priests – at present a combined cost of around £55k a year. Money currently received from National Church called Lowest Income Community Funding, will be used to support ministry costs in the most deprived LMPs, to ensure that we are able to sustain ministry in some of our more deprived areas.

We plan to have a team of Covenant Pastors who will support the roll-out of the Covenant Scheme. Working in pairs from April 2021, they will visit parishes to assist them in forming their covenanted pledge. These pledges will need to be realistic, but we trust ambitious. Our hope is for each LMP to be self-sustaining by 2025 (mindful of the fact that to achieve this some will also need Lowest Income Funding support). Our hope, moreover, is that in time, mutual care and financial support will develop between congregations, parishes and benefices. If a parish is unable to honour its covenanted pledge, might not the LMP's other parishes cover the shortfall and support the under-paying parish in addressing the root causes of the issue?

## **Proposals for Growth**

We know we can grow as a Church in Greater Lincolnshire, in numbers, in diversity of worshippers and in our service to our communities. We understand that local areas will be best placed to plan for, deliver and monitor this growth, with different expectations for different types of communities and for different church type. We know that there is need for relevant, effective support and training. We would like to see at least 1 voluntary 'Mission Enabler' in each DP, forming a working group across the diocese. Mission Enablers will support the design and implementation of locally agreed Enabling Discipleship Growth Programmes in each DP, equipping people to become, as Pope Francis puts it, "a church of missionary disciples": disciples who make disciples. Our fertile land has supported growth for centuries. We now need to grow new generations of rural, urban, coastal and market town Lincoln Christians, and we can: together.

## **Proposals for Costs**

The services we provide centrally must be clearly seen as a "Parish Support Service" – combining advice on finance, church buildings, property, safeguarding, governance and administration - to best support delivery of the new way of working, as efficiently as we are able. Central support of Mission and Ministry will combine under a new "College of St Hugh", which will include the Lincoln School of Theology, as well as contributions from diocesan clergy and lay ministers, using their gifts and experience in a diocesan wide ministry.

## **Proposals for Assets**

We are fortunate as a diocese in having assets left to us from previous generations of Lincolnshire Christians. Our aim will be to maintain these assets at a level where they continue to contribute at least £2M to the annual income of the diocese (about 30% of total costs by 2025). This will cover the cost of curates, national church contributions, strategic programmes, and all other legally required and operationally essential central costs. Funding this through our assets will allow local areas to focus on covering their own costs of ministry.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the proposals that will go to Synod set a vision for the collaborative church which we believe we must now become, in order to flourish as the Diocese of Lincoln into the next five years and beyond. They are, however, still work in progress, and can still be changed and refined. Therefore, please talk about them, pray about them, and if you choose, please write to us about them at: [rsc@lincoln.anglican.org](mailto:rsc@lincoln.anglican.org) or Resourcing Sustainable Church, Edward King House, Minster Yard, Lincoln, LN2 1PU. Please take what you read to God, in your heart and in your mind. Seek his guidance. And thank you for all that you are in your Christian faith and life and discipleship.