

We have a healthy mix of items for today's agenda - both outward facing, with presentations on our Modern Slavery Statement and interfaith work, while not ignoring the internal challenges – we'll also have reports on our budget and appointments.

That is a really important principle for all our work. The temptation when faced with a £2 million deficit and major internal debates on doctrine and ethics, is to retreat and assume that we can't do anything until we have sorted out our financial situation. Or we lose confidence – how can we engage with society when everyone can see our internal disagreements? Both would be a real mistake.

So I want to state again, very simply, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, that our vision and mission have not changed, and will not change even if we run out of money completely (which I am confident we are not going to do). Our vision is the Kingdom of God; and that vision is not dependent on our finances.

Jesus didn't have much of a budget. We know he was supported by various wealthy individuals. And we know that Judas acted as Treasurer (which is perhaps why many of our churches struggle to find a treasurer – no one wants to be compared to Judas!) But Jesus also spoke of not having a place to lay his head, and of disciples not carrying anything with them as they were sent out to share the good news. Christ and his disciples lived incredibly simply, focused on proclaiming and enacting the Kingdom of God.

Our mission is not dependent on our budget either. The three key questions – how are we growing in depth of discipleship, in numbers of disciples, and in loving service of the world – have not changed. I am encouraged to see how so many churches have been using these questions and hope you will go on doing so.

What will have to change, though, is our strategy – which is a way of saying how we work towards our vision and mission. Having less money does mean we have to find a different way of working. That doesn't amount to a simplistic equation of less money equals fewer clergy. Rather, it's a much subtler question about the role of stipendiary clergy, self-supporting clergy, self-supporting lay ministers, possibly stipendiary children, youth and family ministers.

I am delighted that Barry Hill has agreed to take on role of Strategy Development Enabler, which is funded by the national church, and I am grateful to the Market Harborough Team for releasing him for this work. Barry will work with a small group, including Bishop Saju, Jonathan Kerry, Claire Bampton and Chris Sheldon, to

develop our strategy. Their aim is to get us to a point where we can state clearly and succinctly how we will continue to deliver our vision and mission in a context where we have less money, and are more dependent on national church grants.

Minster Communities will be central to this, but there are a host of other questions as well – how do we continue the exciting church planting and Fresh Expressions work which we've been doing in recent years? How do we continue to become more intercultural as a diocese, and truly engage with children and young people? How will we become more environmentally friendly? And how will we work for reconciliation both within the church and in society at large?

I'm excited by the prospect of a genuine attempt to reimagine how we serve our communities, how we exercise the cure of souls, and how we proclaim the Gospel of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. In a way, we will keep doing what we've always done – loving, serving, proclaiming; we will just be doing it in a different way.