

## Shaped By God Together: Minster Communities Progress

Diocesan Synod, April 2023

This paper seeks to update Diocesan Synod on the progress of implementing the Synod's decision to approve the Diocesan framework of Minster Communities. It includes links to additional information. It is recommended that Synod members make use of these links as they give useful reminders and although all previously published and shared, it may be that you have not seen them all before. At the Synod meeting we will hear directly from some of those involved.

### Background

The [Shaped By God Together process](#) began in autumn 2020. Following a period of diocesan-wide story gathering and creative exploration of ideas, three possible models of ministry were discussed across the diocese and the feedback (400 local conversations generating 85,000 words of feedback) informed a two-and-a-half-day meeting of the Extended Bishops Council<sup>1</sup> in July 2021. The Council identified key components from the ministry models which have subsequently been developed into a Diocesan Framework of Minster Communities. The [framework](#) was presented to Diocesan Synod in October 2021 and received strong support of 72% in favour overall, and a greater than 2/3 majority in all houses.

Following this approval, we have developed a facilitated process to work with groups of churches to shape and form each Minster Community. We have been piloting this process in three places across the diocese:

#### 1: Launde Minster Community

Following significant work through the Minster Community formation process, churches across the Launde area have developed the proposal for their Minster Community. The proposal has emerged through the pilot process, has been refined following feedback from the PCCs and Joint Archdeaconry Mission Committee (JAMC). Through already established Growing Faith work in the area, they have been in conversation with their local schools and this has significantly informed their thinking and discernment. The Bishop's Council received the Launde Minster Community proposal at their meeting in March 2023 and following their formal approval,

### A reminder:

#### Why are we doing this?

- *The world around us and the society we live in has changed significantly over recent years and continues to change. We need to continually learn new ways to engage with the changing world, as we live out our faith and seek to grow in numbers of disciples, depth of discipleship and loving service of the world.*
- *We are looking to the future and seeking to discern how God is reshaping us.*
- *We are seeking to prioritise our work with children, young people and families, especially through partnership with our schools.*
- *The pastoral burden on clergy, lay ministers and church officers is huge.*
- *The wellbeing of our clergy, lay ministers, church officers and volunteers. We have heard time and time again that we cannot continue as we are, and simply stretch our resources ever thinner.*
- *Our financial challenges are significant.*

<sup>1</sup> Extended Bishops Council refers to meetings of the Bishops Council and all Area Deans and Lay Chairs.

Bishop Martyn will formally launch the [Launde Minster Community](#) and commission Jonathan Dowman as Oversight Minister at a service on 30<sup>th</sup> April. The Minster Community is guided by the vision that was created and agreed to by the people and churches of Launde: ***“We believe that the Launde Minster Community is becoming a viable worshipping community, called to be those who build the ‘Kingdom of God’ and who equip one another for following Jesus for the whole of life.”*** Bishop Martyn recently reflected on his Lent Pilgrimage, sharing that he had noticed a really positive sense of partnership and relationship across the Launde area and was encouraged by the impact that the process of forming a Minster Community was already having on the churches and people. There is still much to be worked out and undoubtedly challenges ahead, some as yet unknown, but there is hope and aspiration too.

### 2: Group of churches in North West Leicestershire

This second [group of churches](#) to start working through the process of forming as a Minster Community began in early Summer 2022. Following the initial phase, the churches of the Woodfield Team undertook a facilitated process and discerned decided that this was not the right grouping for them to be exploring a Minster Community, and have withdrawn from this process, and are now looking towards taking up the conversations again with a different grouping. The facilitators working with the group have supported them through this decision. The process continues with all the other churches, and they are just completing work in a number of Working Groups who have explored in more detail the possibilities for this Minster Community in the areas of Growing Faith and engaging with schools, discipleship and mission, ministry, finance and church buildings. There is enthusiasm for Growing Faith work together particularly with schools, and a recognition that the forming of a Minster Community is a significant piece of work for both individual churches and collectively. The timescale is a little delayed by the intermediate discernment with Woodfield, but overall the emergent MC is currently on track for a submission to JAMC in the Autumn.

### 3: Group of churches in North East Leicester

[This group](#) began in early 2023 and are just starting to do the detailed exploration of what their Minster Community could be like through Working Groups considering the areas of New Communities and Growing Faith and Schools, as well as a wider consideration of mission and discipleship. Other Working Groups will consider Generosity and Finance, Church Buildings and Ministry. This group of churches recognises their breadth and diversity and decided to do some early work on articulating the vision they share and gather around. This focusses upon a shared vision of making disciples of Jesus, and prioritizing the 3 key questions so as to see more signs of the Kingdom of God.

### Learning and looking to the future

As the first to journey through the process and do the work of forming a Minster Community, the people involved in all the pilot groups have generously helped make this better for everyone else across the diocese. We will all continue to learn together, act on that learning, and [share the story](#). An initial [learning review](#) was undertaken, including with Bishop’s Council in their strategic and advisory role. One of the key pieces of learning was

that we need to enable more local active participation for churches in the initial grouping that will work together to explore forming as a Minster Community. For this reason, we have developed and adapted our process so that we will work across larger areas in the early stages, and then involve all the local churches in deciding together what the groupings of churches should be that will work together in more detail to develop proposals for each Minster Community. We are just beginning to work with the first larger area across the north-east of the diocese to form two Minster Communities.

In recent months, Bishop Martyn commissioned a significant listening exercise, during which an external consultant ran a series of focus groups to consider what we need to pay attention to for church leaders to thrive during the transition to Minster Communities. The findings from this focus group research have been shared with all church leaders (ordained, lay, and church wardens) who are not yet in a pilot area. Several recommendations came out of this focus group research and these will inform how we facilitate and communicate about the formation of Minster Communities going forward.

One piece of feedback we hear consistently is a request for more information. Within the capacity that we have, we seek to provide as much as possible and there are already a range of resources on our new online learning platform, The Hub, relating to Minster Community formation. We will use The Hub to upload more resources throughout the SBTG process. This includes videos, explainer documents and resources to use with your congregations in both preparation for the process and during the process. We hope this will be a key way in which we can help you to know and understand what is happening regarding Minster Communities so that you can share this with others.

Following the listening exercise, Bishop Martyn reflected: “‘The diocese’, I know, can feel like a distant, abstract entity to those embedded in parish life, and I know there are fears that Minster Communities are being devised and managed from the centre. But, the diocese is all of us – every worshipping community, whatever its size, location or theological tradition – and every role at St Martins House and Bishop’s Lodge exists to support you all in your ministry. So, when it comes to forming Minster Communities, the part played by the Parish Transition and Ministry Development Team is to listen, facilitate and support, not to impose. They will help you prayerfully discern what this model will look like in your context so that we all, as part of the Body of Christ in Leicester and Leicestershire, can help to realise the Kingdom of God in the years to come. It is a process in which we support you in identifying and articulating personal and collective strengths, callings and opportunities, and one in which every worshipping community has an equal voice.” Part of this prayerful discernment is facing into the hard questions we need to ask of ourselves as a diocese.

---

You can access **The Hub** by clicking here: <https://thehub.leicester.anglican.org/> Click "Log In" and select 'Register'. Please use the same email to register that you currently receive Diomail on. (If you don't receive Diomail then you can sign up here: <https://www.leicester.anglican.org/news/diomail/> - although you can sign up for The Hub without subscribing to Diomail). All diocesan events will be booked via The Hub in the future and there are lots of other learning topics so creating an account will be helpful in other areas of your ministry

---

Discernment always involves choices, and the facilitation team will also hold participating churches to the process!

What can churches do now?

1. Focus on **deepening discipleship** and developing the practice of **Christian discernment**. Some resources that may be useful are the [Holy Habits](#): Dwelling in the Word and the Community Examen.
2. **Know who you are as a church**. The [Discussion Starter](#) is designed to help your church or fresh expression take stock of where you have been placed by God and who you are as a church. Doing this gives you a chance to think about what you could offer to a future Minster Community and what benefits you may gain from joining in partnership with other worshipping communities, such as church schools, chaplaincies or fresh expressions of Church as well as other traditional churches. This is about helping each other to continue serving your parish and to build on your own unique identity as a worshipping community. The discussion starter will help you know and tell your own story as a church – and will be a resource for you as you engage in the process.
3. **Understand your local community**. There are lots of places that provide information and the [Church Urban Fund's parish profiles](#) are a really good place to start. For example, a PCC or other church gathering could look at the profile and explore questions such as “is there anything here that surprises us?”, “how might this information inform our mission and ministry?”.
4. **Don't be afraid to start anything new** - one of the comments we heard through the focus groups was that the prospect of Minster Communities was holding people back from starting any new initiatives within their churches in case they couldn't be continued in a Minster Community. The facilitation and formation process takes a strengths-based approach which seeks to encourage the giftings and mission of your church. So don't be afraid to explore new ways of serving and blessing your communities in the meantime.

*Claire Bampton  
Diocesan Programme Manager*