

# Newcastle Diocesan Synod November 2020

## Growing church bringing hope: next steps

### Discerning values and priorities



#### Introduction

1. As a diocese we are living in a 'Kairos moment'<sup>1</sup> – a time of opportunities and significant decisions where circumstances demand our courage and faith in God, characterised by '*I am about to do a new thing...*' (Isaiah 43.19). As we seek our next steps in our vision of **growing church bringing hope**, we are revisiting our values and identifying our priorities in order that we might better discern the shape and pattern of our calling for the coming years.
2. Luke 10.1-11 is proving a rich source for reflection on our mission and ministry:

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and *sent them* on ahead of him *in pairs to every town and place* where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" <sup>6</sup> And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*" <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: *the kingdom of God has come near.*"<sup>12</sup> I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

#### Values:

3. Values and Priorities for 'next steps' were articulated to Diocesan Synod for the first time on 26 September 2020 in draft form. We wanted to build on the long-held values of the diocese to be **generous, engaged and open**, but to offer a new, tighter focus, within **growing church bringing hope**, for the current season of our life together.
4. We believe our values are for **everyone, every day, everywhere**, and must not lose sight of the individual, respect context, value the call of all ages, stages and backgrounds, and that we are all ordinary people made extraordinary in God's transforming love. We are all '*sent*' in some way and we are all part of the work of the Kingdom of God which has '*come near*'.
5. For this time, our core Values might be expressed as follows:
  - 5.1 **Open to God's transforming love:**  
Rooted in who we are and whose we are: formed, shaped, called and sent in the love of God – created, redeemed and sustained by the Trinity of love. This roots us in relationship with God,

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<sup>1</sup> Identified by Bishop Christine at Diocesan Synod in May 2019.

whose overflow of love always flows outward into the world and calls us to faith, hope and love. The message of *'peace'* or *'shalom'* is first one from God who greets us in peace and through the cross of Jesus Christ draws us into relationship and reconciles us in his peace, and then sends us out as bringers of peace and peacemakers.

.2 **Generous with God's transforming gifts:**

Because of God's transforming love, we are to be generous with one another, sharing our gifts as ordained and lay in collaboration or *'in pairs'*. We are to be generous with our resources, our finances and human resources, always conscious of why we share and how we share. We are not meant to be self-sufficient but to rely on God's generosity and enjoy an interdependence with others in partnership and community.

.3 **Engaged in God's transforming mission in the world:**

God's love and generosity compel and propel us outwards, to be engaged in our communities or *'to every town and place'*. We are to engage meaningfully and intentionally, through social justice and evangelism, working in partnership with others, and for the sake of others. We are part of the mission of the Kingdom of God which is not narrowly defined, but perhaps best defined in this generation by the 5 Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion:

- "To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

6. As we live out these values, we are expressing in, and through, our corporate life, faith, hope and love in Jesus Christ; our sense of being and belonging which is rooted in the transforming love of God and sends us out into the world in loving service.

### **Priorities:**

7. In moving from Values to define Priorities, we sense a shift for us as a diocese where we are more comfortable upholding values and less inclined to limit ourselves through priorities, which inevitably mean some things are not given priority. We are conscious that God's call focuses attention, and in order to do something we must recognise what we are not to do; we might explore our equivalent of *'Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.'*
8. Our Priorities flow from our shared Values and were first expressed as 'bringing to faith', 'growing in faith' and 'living in faith'. In conversations and consultations, it is these Priorities that have led to most discussion and some expression of unease with language and what might be implied. We have taken these concerns seriously, but on reflection, with some clarifications, we think it is appropriate to continue with **bringing, growing and living**.
9. Firstly, we recognise **bringing, growing and living** are dynamic and active words which may lead us to a focus on 'doing' rather than 'being'. We are conscious of this tension, and commit to ongoing scriptural, theological reflection and prayer which roots us in 'being' open to God's transforming love first and foremost which is the heart and ground of all we 'do'.
10. Secondly, these are priorities for our corporate life, not just for individuals, but for everyone in all our church communities, however 'church' may be expressed in our 'mixed ecology'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> We note a growing consensus moving from speaking of a 'mixed economy' to a 'mixed ecology' of church. This allows for a greater range of expressions of church and importantly includes the digital space.

11. Thirdly, we recognise that for some there can be unhelpful power dynamics at play particularly around any notion of **'bringing'**. For some this emphasises a sense of those who have something to bring and those who do not have anything (emphasising the 'haves' and 'have nots'), or of others being 'done to' or having something 'foisted upon them'. We have weighed up these concerns, but have concluded that we want to be clear that, as the Church of God, we do have something to offer and we 'bring something to the table'. However, we have sought to be clearer in what we are **bringing**, but also, want to affirm that in all of these Priorities we aspire to God's requirement that we *do justice* in our **bringing**, *love kindness* in our **living** and *walk humbly* in our **growing** together.<sup>3</sup>

#### 11.1 **Bringing** good news:

We are called to *'bring good news to the poor...'* (Luke 4.18 ff): we seek to prioritise how we resource our mission, evangelism, community development and social action. Questions might include how will we demonstrate the abundant life of Jesus Christ in thought, word and action and share God's gracious invitation to his table.<sup>4</sup>

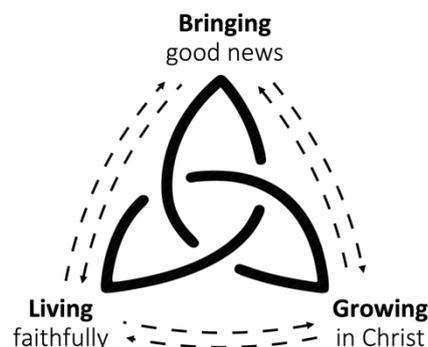
#### 11.2 **Growing** in Christ:

We are called to maturity in Christ, to grow as Christ's body: we need to prioritise how we nurture and resource our growth. We are all always learning and need to prioritise how we resource the nurture of faith, vocations, lay training and clergy development, and consider who we learn from. Questions might include how we are we called to love, live and serve in our communities, schools, work places, households and churches.<sup>5</sup>

#### 11.3 **Living** faithfully:

We are called to live faithfully together, as those gathered at the Lord's Table: we seek to prioritise how we resource our shared life, develop prayerful, peace-filled communities, build partnerships and work together. Questions might include how we live in mutual relationship, support one another, and live out a faith which is risky because God is always calling and sending us outwards, deeper and further.

12. These Priorities are not unconnected or standalone, they interrelate and interact, and are interdependent. Previously we had illustrated this connectivity through the 3 points of a triangle, but we think a clearer symbol of the Trinity is preferable (see below). This speaks more clearly of the dynamic, participative life of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer which we hope these Priorities will express outwardly through our own **bringing, growing** and **living**.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>3</sup> C.f. 'He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6.8).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. see Theos/CUF report 'Growing Good: Growth, Social Action and Discipleship in the Church of England'.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. see 'Kingdom Calling: The vocation, ministry and discipleship of the whole people of God'. Also, the 'Growing Faith' and 'Everyday Faith' initiatives of the Church of England.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. see the ongoing conversation 'Living in Love and Faith' and the 'Pastoral Principles'.