

Diocese of Newcastle Mission – Strategic Summary and Bishops’ Teaching Document

Mission: A Strategic Summary

In Newcastle Diocese, our mission strategy is summarised in our overall vision of ‘Growing Church Bringing Hope’. This will always be embodied in lives and actions which seek to be Generous, Engaged, and Open.

On the 7th of May 2005 our Diocesan Synod adopted an approach outlined in their paper “*Sharing our Faith - A Strategy for Putting Evangelism at the Heart of the Life of the Diocese*” committing us to ‘*put evangelism at the heart of the life of the Diocese [of Newcastle]*’ⁱ. We have sought to be ‘*a Diocese where...*

- ... *evangelism is in our ‘bloodstream’, in every area of our life and work.*
- ... *every parish church is engaging in evangelistic activity and seeing the links between its contact with the wider community, its faith sharing activities and its nurture of new Christians.*
- ... *each deanery is actively supporting and facilitating the faith sharing activities of its parishes.*
- ... *every part of the diocesan structure is actively committed to the equipping of parishes and deaneries for local evangelism.*
- ... *there is an average growth of 3% per annum in church attendance in the coming years.*ⁱⁱ

The following key principles, to which we have been committed since 2005, are important for us to recall and reaffirm as we renew our mission strategy.

1. We recognise that it is important to work in Clustersⁱⁱⁱ which may be bigger than a benefice and not necessarily coterminous with a deanery. The missional imperative shapes our polity, rather than being shaped by it.
2. ‘*Becoming a Christian is a process, not a single moment of crisis within the life of an individual. Most people become Christians over a long period of time. Evangelism therefore must also be a process...*’^{iv}
3. ‘*Evangelism is necessarily an integral part of the life of the church, not a bolt-on extra... a vital part of the church’s engagement with the “missio dei”, the mission of God to the world.*’^v
4. Six key insights from our own experience
 - a. ‘*The need to make contact with those who at present have no connection to the church.*
 - b. ‘*The need to meet people on their own ground, not expect them to always come into the church.*
 - c. ‘*The willingness to make radical changes to the way we worship in order to be more accessible to others.*
 - d. ‘*The need to review our own church life and make sure we are being good news ourselves.*
 - e. ‘*The need to involve as wide a spread of people as possible in evangelism: young and old, lay and ordained, Anglican and ecumenical contacts.*

- f. *The need to be organised and intentional in what we do: setting ourselves timetables and holding ourselves accountable.^{vi}*
- 5. Eight statements we hold to be true about sharing our faith:
 - a. *'It is part of God's nature to seek people out so they can have a life-giving, developing relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are here to help.*
 - b. *All Christians are called by God to be involved in faith sharing.*
 - c. *Faith sharing isn't just about what we do in church, but what we do at home, at work and in our places of leisure.*
 - d. *Prayer is vital for our faith sharing.*
 - e. *Our principal motivation in faith sharing should be love for people.*
 - f. *Faith sharing needs words and deeds to walk hand in hand.*
 - g. *Faith Sharing needs to be seen as something we do deliberately.*
 - h. *Becoming a Christian involves joining a community.^{vii}*
- 6. We recognise the need for *"new forms of church presence... to ensure that our evangelism as a diocese is not just parish-church based, but innovative, with a willingness to engage in developing new forms of church where necessary to show a commitment to these new networks and communities."^{viii}*
- 7. We recognise the vital importance of nurturing new Christians.^{ix}

Today we continue this journey. As we have committed ourselves to growing church bringing hope in ways which are generous, open and engaged, we seek to serve our communities and offer people the hope of Christ, inviting them into living communities of faith in order that they might grow in Christlikeness and serve others in His name. We have two related ways of describing this, one in terms of the journeys we invite people to explore, and the second in terms of our strategic tasks; the first a person-centred approach, the second a task-centred one. These are two related ways of looking at the same processes and both matter.

Arising from this strategy we committed ourselves to a process of Mission Action Planning, originally called "Sharing our Faith Action Plans". We recognise that this has been important to the Diocese and are currently committed to reviewing and renewing these processes after four rounds of Action Planning. We have sought to work this strategy out through a number of strands of work, summarised in the following section.

Mission Action – Strategic Strands

We have a number of strands to enacting our mission strategy, intended to work in sympathetic harmony, whilst allowing for the maximum subsidiarity as we make this as local as possible, and diversity as we embrace the rich variety of God's work among us.

1) *The evangelistic work done locally in benefices...*

- ... is the foundation and the front line of this work. In particular we need to focus on:
 - a) Refreshing the Mission Action Planning process, looking at content, timing, deanery co-ordination, and Senior Staff response and engagement.
 - b) Encouraging evangelism as an element in ministerial vocation, offering appropriate training, encouragement, and follow-up.
 - c) Developing space, perhaps building on the work of the Local Ministry Development Group, for local practice to be shared, and Clergy and lay leaders to talk and be heard.

- d) Greater links between the parishes and the work of the Evangelism Task Group need to be developed continually, for example in setting targets for the number of parish groups delivering 'Invitation' and 'Faith Stories' training session.

2) The work of the Evangelism Task Group...

... is key to all of this, but specific things they have done include:

- a) The Faith Stories course – addressing blockage B and seeking to give people confidence that they have a story to tell and then to tell it.
- b) The Invitation course – addressing blockage C and giving people confidence to offer the invitations essential to growing the crowd and encouraging questioners?
- c) Find Out More – creating a locally developed option for one type of *Pathway to faith*
- d) The Welcome course is the next piece of work planned as the ETG continues to work through the agenda set by the 'Way Ahead'. This is a vital piece of work which must be prioritised, developed, and delivered.
- e) The task group will seek to partner in the refreshing of the Mission Action Planning process in line with the vision of Growing Church Bringing Hope.

3) The work of the Discipleship Task Group:

not least in the open Synod and training material encouraging people to mature in Christ as they journey along *Pathways in faith*. This work is currently being held by the Ministry Council.

4) Our work in the Social Justice arena including Together Newcastle, Partners in Community Action, the Poverty Task Group, Citizens Tyne and Wear, the West End Refugee Service, Walking With, and the Foodbanks.

5) The Companions of St Aidan as they seek to partner in mission.

6) Key Senior Appointments

- a) The leadership of the Bishop of Newcastle in our commitment to growth and community engagement is key.
- b) The Bishop of Berwick has a brief for Mission and is responsible for, and actively promoting, this area of the life of the Diocese
- c) The Director of Discipleship and Ministry for Mission is recently appointed to increase the Diocese' leadership capacity in mission and ministry and the development of discipleship as outlined in this paper.

7) Mission weekends

These happen at least four times a year around the Diocese and are particularly focussed on helping people to take steps of faith and join in *Pathways in faith*. This is about increasing the size of the crowd and inviting the crowds to become questioners, and the questioners to become apprentices. We rejoice that the Pathways Mission will also happen in 2018.

8) The work implementing the Church Planting Strategy, of which the Resource Church and Resourcing Clusters are a key part, addresses a number of parts of this journey

- a) Planting new churches and expressions of Christian Community:
 - i) Naturally attracts a crowd and is set up to invite people to become fans of Christ
 - ii) Addresses blockage D enabling new people to join

- iii) Focuses the planting team both on *Pathways of faith*, and *Pathways to faith* as they seek to grow a new community
- iv) Unites communities together on new *Pathways in faith* as they need to join in a new endeavour
- v) Gives space for imaginative engagement with as yet untouched parts of our society, further growing the crowd.
- b) Releasing lay and ordained ministries which are shaped around mission addresses blockage A, and models practice which addresses blockage B and enables others to join in. The mentoring inherent in, and necessary to, this growth actively challenges disciples to allow themselves to be sent.
- c) Models evangelism at the heart of church life, exploring different pathways to faith and addressing blockage C

9) *Leading Your Church into Growth...*

... which is, of course, a strand in our Diocesan Vision, is key as we seek to root this in parish life. There is a desire to monitor, assess, learn from, and communicate experiences of LYCIG parishes, including the role of LYCIG mentors and 'LYCIG local'.

10) *Renewing prayer life...*

... is central to effective mission, and this is the first strand of our Diocesan Vision.

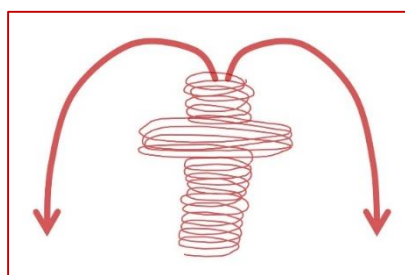
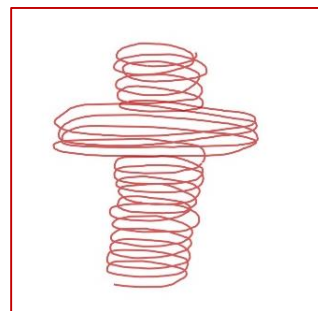
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As we reflect on the Mission strategy and practice which we have developed and inherited in the life of Newcastle Diocese, we offer the following reflections.

Mission – our personal journeys

A strategic approach to mission is important, but we should remember that our shared adventure in mission will not usually *feel* strategic either individually or as local church. Each person's encounter with the living Christ is personal, unique, precious, and beautiful. We can talk in terms of three pathways that the church is called to explore, inhabit, nurture, and offer guidance in, as people come to Christ and mature in Him. They work together, bringing life and energy to the church and hope to our communities, but they are easily blocked.

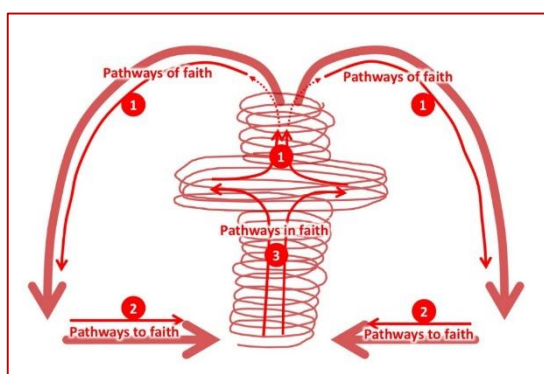
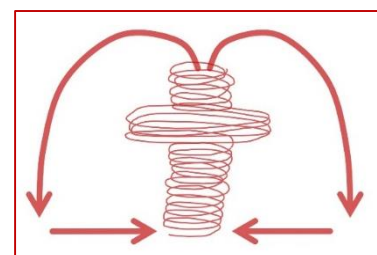
1500 years ago missionaries were invited to our lands and walked this part of the world teaching us to follow Christ on new **pathways in faith**. We draw this as an ascending spiral as we recognise that we often walk and re-walk the same ground as we journey in faith. However, we are always growing; each time we revisit the empty tomb or stand with the disciples looking up into heaven, each time we journey through grief or celebrate a baptism, we have grown and we are not the same as the last time we journeyed this way. It is shaped as a cross because we find as we mature that the life of faith is more vast and beautiful than we had ever glimpsed, and as we mature further we discover that it is also more focussed...



... which brings us to the first arrows. Just as Christ's priorities were to seek and to save the lost, so we are called to risk taking steps of faith outside the community of faith... stepping out in order that we might share Christ's love beyond the church. All are called to this missional task and we recognise that there is no sense of spiritual maturity in the New Testament which does not involve personal engagement in mission. Thus, as we journey the pathways in faith, we are thrown out on the highways and

byways of the **pathways of faith**.

And here we meet people with real needs to whom we are sent with the generous loving hope of Christ. Often our service will be very practical, but it is always rooted in our faith in Christ and our desire for others to find the treasure we have found in Him. We want to explore with them their own **pathways to faith** in Christ.



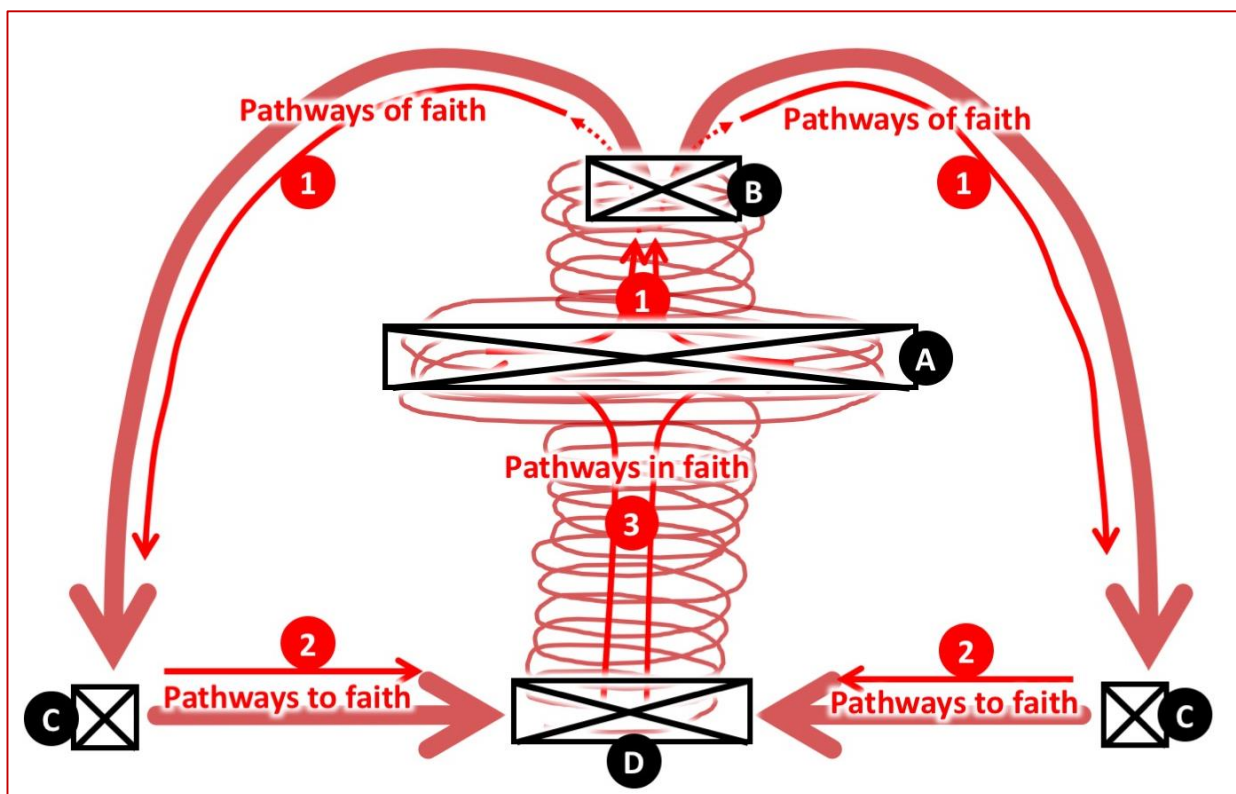
We can highlight these three journeys on the diagram:

1. The pathways of faith with Christ
2. The pathways to faith in Christ
3. The pathways in faith, growing together as Church

This diagram also emphasises the reality that maturation in faith involves enacted commitment to mission. This is a positive cycle of growth; the more we step out in faith, the more faith grows. This risk-taking process is the journey of growing discipleship both as individuals and as a

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community. 'From Anecdote to Evidence' (2011-2013) states "churches that say they have a clear mission and purpose are far more likely to report growth. Of those who report a clear sense of mission and purpose, 64% have grown compared to 25% which had declined. For those who stated they did not have a clear sense of mission and purpose 26% had grown and 52% had declined." We recognise, however, that it is easy to get stuck in this cycle and this is represented by the black boxes on the larger diagram below.



Sadly (and ironically), we can get stuck in our own discipleship (A), awed by the majesty of God but allowing ourselves to become perpetual recipients of grace rather than partnering in the mission of Christ and stepping out in the pathways of faith.

At times we get stuck (B) because we want to step out but don't know how.

Sometimes we are stuck (C) when we meet people and don't know how to introduce them onto their own pathway to faith.

And we often get stuck (D) when people come to faith and we don't know how to include them in an existing Christian Community. We all have preferences and needs, and come to like the things we know; change is hard even when it is necessary to love or engage the newcomer.

We have been developing these pathways with the support of our bishops through the work of the Evangelism Task Group, not least through mission weekends and our training for the Pathways Mission (Sept 2018).

'Evangelism: Way Ahead' (2015) worked to identify many of the significant blockages we face and to develop resources to help us address them in a manner which works in the specific context of the North East. These resources include 'Faith stories', the 'Invitation' course, and

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we will be working on the 'Welcome' course after the Pathways Mission. These pieces of work are ongoing as we continue to follow the agenda set by the 'Way Ahead' document.

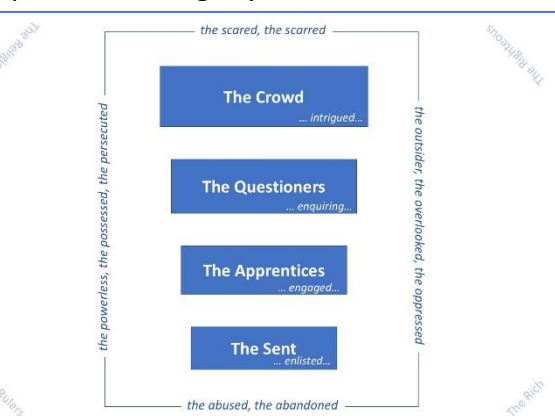
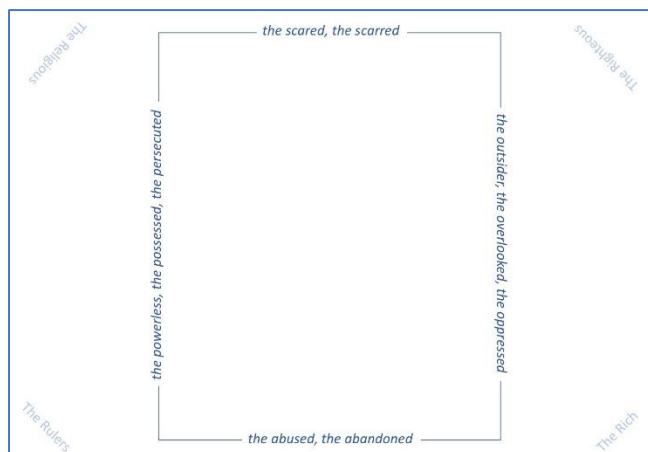
Mission – our strategic approach

This person-centred approach to mission is vital in the Diocese of Newcastle. Alongside this, though, we can look at the same overall process from a more task-centred perspective. This, complementary approach can help us better understand our shared labour of love as we care for each other, those beyond the church, and ourselves. Loosely speaking, when we look at the gospels, we see different groupings of people engaging with Jesus, to whom we shall return in a moment. First we must note that there are many who stand apart from Christ, either because they see themselves as better than Him, or because they find themselves hurt, broken, and powerless. These are treated quite differently in the gospels.

On the one hand we see the religious, the rich, the (self-)righteous, and the rulers (those with power), whom Jesus clearly loves but for whom we see deep challenge in the gospels. On the other hand we see those who dare not follow: the scared and the scarred, the abused and the abandoned, the overlooked and the outsider, the powerless and the possessed.

Circumstances keep them away, but their lives are transformed when they encounter Christ, who is always biased to the outsider; people never neatly fit into strategic processes!

Thus, a strategic or systematic approach to mission is helpful but comes with a health warning: some stand apart from Christ out of choice some simply by circumstance. We are called to love and serve, without judging or 'pidgeon-holing' those who don't fit in. God is at work beyond our boundaries and the neat diagrams below will always be much messier in practice... the glory of God is often birthed in mess.



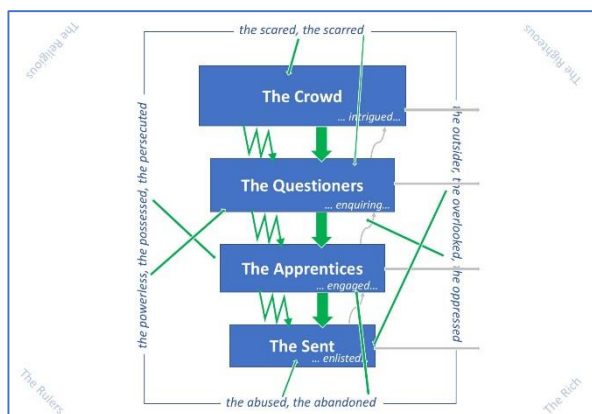
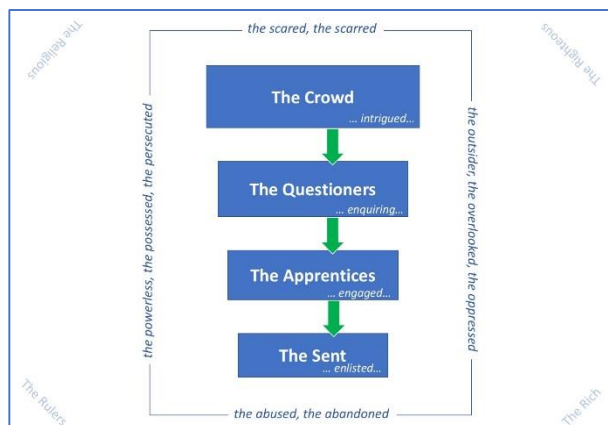
This being accepted, when we cautiously look beyond the individual we see four loose groupings of people around Jesus for whom we might borrow New-Testament-type names and call them:

1. The 'crowd' who turn up to things – the intrigued – who gather out of interest or need
2. The 'questioners', those who are seeking – the enquiring – who hang around Jesus learning and enquiring
3. The 'apprentices', called to be disciples – the engaged – who shape their lives around Jesus
4. The 'sent', who hear the missionary instruction of Jesus and go out – the enlisted – who are intentionally, however cautiously, engaged in the mission of God in Christ

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In simple terms, looking at this diagram, it is the movement in which we are interested, represented by the green arrows in the diagram to the right. We unashamedly want people to draw closer to Jesus and align their lives with Him as we believe this is the best possible thing that could ever happen for them.

This is helpful as a simple flow chart, but as soon as we draw it, we need to remind ourselves that life is not this simple. In reality people move in all manner of messy directions both towards Christ (represented by the green arrows below), and away from Him (represented by the grey).



In reality any diagram would be criss-crossed with lines and we forget this at our peril; dehumanising the missional task runs directly counter to the incarnation.

Furthermore, the sent are always apprentices, and often the questioners end up being sent... and so on... Nevertheless, simplicity helps understanding and so for the sake of focus we remain with the key direction of travel and this helps us to see a number of things:

Our missional task (1) is to increase the size of the 'crowd' through generous loving service and prayerful engagement in society. This is the what happens when we take steps of faith beyond our comfort zone following the pathways of faith, and can be very simple. It is what we have done through toddler groups or 'beer and hymns'; the challenge is to allow Christ to be at the heart of what we do.

Our evangelistic task (2) is to offer Jesus' invitation 'Come to me' to the crowd inviting followers, providing clear pathways to faith. This might be based around individual conversation, or opportunities within the church like baptism preparation. It might be in more focussed groups which give people an opportunity to explore what Christ invites them into and engage with questions of faith for themselves.

Our disciple-making task (3) is to offer Jesus' invitation 'Follow me' to those who have gathered around him, encouraging people to grow as they follow pathways in faith. This is usually a shared task as we encourage one another to grow in Christ. It involves our public worship but also goes beyond this, and is often helped by meeting in smaller contexts.

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Our 'vocational' task (1) is to offer Jesus' challenge to 'Go ahead of him into every place he was about to go', sending disciples into the world in Christ's name to love, serve, witness, and pray. This means that the vocational task links directly with our missional task; they are two parts of the same journey. There is no sense of spiritual maturity in the New Testament which does not involve mission. We are called to release lay and ordained ministers of hope, bringing the good news of Jesus to this generation in every expression of community. We see this embedded in 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
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

We should note that, in this strategic approach, we see exactly the same three journeys we have seen above in the section on our personal journeys (and they are numbered as such in the diagram here). These are two different ways of looking at our overall mission strategy which we regard this as helpful because they remind us that the key question is how we enable each other to grow, develop, and participate in our shared missional task.

Mission – key challenges

This strategy raises 3 key questions for every parish and deanery:

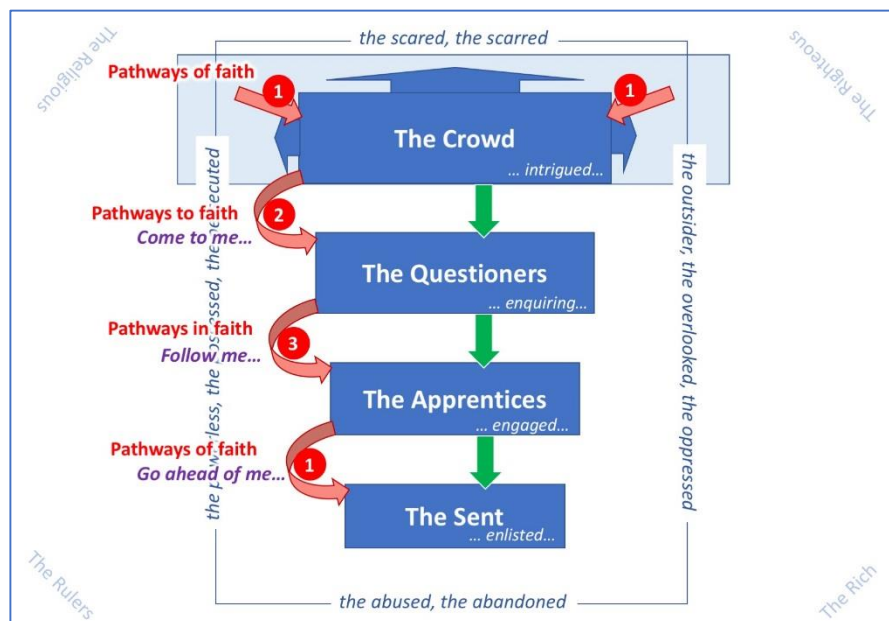
1. How are we releasing the people of God to step out in faith, and grow the 'crowd'?
2. How are we resourcing the church of God by maintaining clear pathways to faith, inviting the crowd to engage and become questioners?
3. How are we challenging the faithful to grow, drawing questioners into studied and faithful maturity as they become 'apprentices of Christ'?

Furthermore, we continue to wrestle with the question of how we rise to the challenges set out for us in 2005, embedding evangelism in every part of the life of the diocese, spanning tradition, style, geography, and size.

Lead and Lag Measures

It will be vital to agree these, and they may include as lead measures things like:

1. Number of benefices running 'Invitation' and 'Faith Stories' training courses



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2. Number of benefices running 'Find out More' or other small-group settings in which people can explore faith
3. Reviewing both MAPPING and MDRs to express an evangelistic priority.

Lag measures might focus on people engaging with exploration of faith, and numbers attending worship.

In order to agree such targets, though, we need to be clear who monitors and evaluates this work, and be realistic about our strategies of engagement.

ⁱ *"Sharing our Faith - A Strategy for Putting Evangelism at the Heart of the Life of the Diocese"*, Newcastle Diocesan Synod, 7th May 2005 – p.3, para 1

ⁱⁱ Ibid – p.3, para 7ff

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid – p.3, para 4

^{iv} Ibid – p.5, para 4ff

^v Ibid – p.5, para 6ff

^{vi} Ibid – p.17, para 2ff

^{vii} Ibid – p.21, para 2ff

^{viii} Ibid – p.33, para 2ff

^{ix} Ibid – p.35, para 1