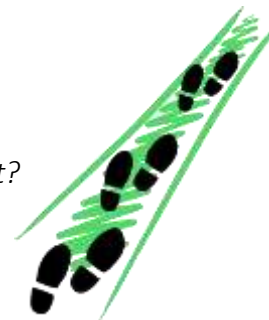


Growing Church Bringing Hope: Next Steps Update Following Diocesan Open Synod March 2021

*“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”
Isaiah 43.18-19*



Next Steps: Introduction

1. These verses from The Prophet Isaiah are a key text for us in our Next Steps. They call us from a concentration on *‘the former things’* to pay attention to the *‘new thing’* that God is doing. The verses suggest that there is a new way in the wilderness to discover and follow.
2. In ancient times the wilderness was an overwhelming and threatening place, full of challenge and uncertainty. We face something similar today as we seek to navigate an already challenging context which has in turn been overwhelmed by the impact of Covid 19: challenge upon challenge upon challenge.
3. But the God of *‘the former things’* and *‘the new thing’* promises to be faithful in *all* things. God *‘will make a way’* and will bring life like *‘rivers in the desert.’* And so, we are being called to discern God’s way and our *‘Next Steps’* as the people of God in Newcastle Diocese.

Next Steps: Who?

1. This document seeks to include and as a result refers to *‘we’*. Most often that *‘we’* aspires to include all those who make up the Church of England in the Diocese of Newcastle.
2. It can also refer to the Core Team leading the discernment of our Next Steps. This team currently comprises Chris Elder (Diocesan Transformation and Strategy Programme Manager), Rob Saner-Haigh (Residentiary Canon Director of Mission and Ministry), Shane Waddle (Diocesan Secretary) and Mark Wroe (Suffragan Bishop of Berwick). The Core Team is working on behalf of the Bishop’s Staff Team, with ongoing conversation with the Bishop’s Council and with the ongoing agreement of the Diocesan Synod. Various other conversations have fed into the work so far; these have included focus groups of lay and ordained from different contexts, meetings of Area Deans and Lay Chairs, and most recently the Diocesan Synod Open Forum (13 March 2021). Members of the Core Team have also met with Deanery Development Groups and attended Deanery Synods and Chapters.
3. These kinds of conversations are ongoing. The Core Team are keen to cultivate a new kind of process which is constantly attentive and adaptive. As a Core Team we do not believe we hold all the answers or possess all the wisdom required, rather we believe the discernment of Next Steps should be a shared process as far as possible. In that sense we are offering a framework for exploration which itself will need to be able to flex. We note therefore that this will be a longer but more responsive process as a result and one that

brings change to all the different parts of our structures, diocese, deanery and parish: *'I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?'* (Isaiah 43.19)

Next Steps: What?

1. **A word about 'Transformation':** The discernment of our Next Steps has been linked with 'transformation'. There has been talk about the 'transformation plan', the 'transformation agenda', or 'strategic transformation'. None of these are necessarily wrong, but this usage can potentially mask the essence of what is meant by transformation in the Church.
2. Those of us working in the Core Team helping discern the 'new thing' for Newcastle Diocese believe that transformation does not describe the changes in patterns of worship, deployment or structures, though these will be part of it. A brief survey of the New Testament reminds us that transformation is the work of God by his Spirit in and through his people: transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12.2); transformed into his image by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3.18 and similarly Philippians 3.21).
3. It might be helpful to think about transformation describing what happens when we witness to God's love and serve the needs of our communities in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is what happens when individuals or groups of people become so inspired by the impact of the person and work of Jesus Christ that their faith compels them to make a difference.
4. Transformation then is not something devised by committee, no matter how holy, nor is it generated by following a particular formula, no matter how worthy. It is God's work. We believe God's work of transformation changes communities through acts of kindness, justice and mercy; changes churches through growth in worship, imagination and generosity of spirit; and changes lives through deepening everyday faith in God and reaching out to others.
5. That does not mean that Next Steps is not concerned with transformation. Next Steps is very much concerned with helping us all create space to encourage more of God's transformation. To take an agricultural image, Next Steps is focused on creating the conditions for growth, like a farmer might prepare his land or a gardener prune her vine. In the words of Paul: *'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.'* (1 Corinthians 3.6)
6. So Next Steps focusses on helping us think about and resource parish ministry moving forward in order to continue to help create new space for transformation. We believe Next Steps can create space for transformation by:
 - better understanding what God is already doing among us in each place;
 - fostering new forms of collaboration between parishes which build capacity for mission and ministry;
 - encouraging discipleship for all ages to help us express our faith at school, at home and at work;
 - discerning more vocations to different kinds of ministries for lay and ordained;

- growing greater partnership between lay and ordained, and the importance of every ministry;
 - improved support and preparation for those serving in leadership for the tasks ahead;
 - planting new communities of faith;
 - developing new and existing projects and partnerships in social action and justice.
7. **A word about parishes:** Next Steps refers to parishes because it is a way of ensuring every part of our diocese is included – everywhere is in a parish. But equally we know that ministry cannot be limited to our church buildings, but must include our homes, schools, colleges, universities, work places, hospitals, care homes, shops, factories, streets, hills, beaches, riversides, networks, partnerships – all the ways we live, work and worship together.
8. **A word about resource:** we have been invited by the National Church to work with them on our Next Steps journey work with a view to an application for significant funding to provide the resources required to enable implementation of the new plans which are discerned. The Core Team meet regularly with National Church colleagues to share learning from other dioceses engaged in similar work and access other tools and resources. However, whether or not national funding is forthcoming, the work of Next Steps is part of our forward journey as a diocese and should continue, albeit resourced solely from local means.
9. **A word about prayer:** we are aware that we are in the business of discerning God’s next steps for us on the path we are being called to travel: *‘I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.’ (Isaiah 43.10)* This cannot be just a function of planning committees, group consultations, meeting agendas or ‘blue sky thinking’, though we trust that the Holy Spirit is working in all of these. This is part of our corporate response to the call of Jesus Christ to ‘follow me’. We need to continue to hold the questions of how we are listening to God and how we are discerning what we are hearing.
10. We are aware of our need for God’s imagination in all our thinking especially in the face of challenges which can seem overwhelming. We acknowledge that transformation is not brought about by a formula, but by the outworking of God’s grace through us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Next Steps is about helping us prayerfully create conditions, clear space and grow confidence to allow prophetic and prayerful imagination to flourish:
- ‘Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.’ (Ephesians 3.20-21)*
11. We are mindful that as a diocese we are a collection of many different worshipping and praying traditions, and that God chooses to communicate in many different ways through different people and traditions. We hope that people will be motivated to pray for our Next Steps and we will seek to enable this as best we can by using a range of means.

Next Steps: Why?

1. At the beginning, this document referred to the challenging context we are facing, not just in our diocese but across the Church, and not just in the Church but across the nation. We face various forms of decline, including decline in the confidence or relevance people place in institutions like the Church. And we face decline in finance as a result of Covid 19, compounded by the uncertainty of Brexit, much of which is only starting to be felt.
2. More locally in Newcastle Diocese, we recognise the significant challenges of decline in our churches: fewer people, less community impact, less money, and dwindling numbers of children and young people. Decline can be charted across various data and statistics, but to briefly illustrate, we can identify a general decline across the diocese in church attendance (using average adult weekly and child Sunday attendance) of 20% between 2010-2020. Though this is not the whole story we cannot ignore it. Data suggests this rate of decline is occurring faster in Newcastle Diocese than the national average.
3. But we also see huge possibilities for change and transformation through the good news of Jesus Christ who brings new life from death, joy from sorrow, hope from despair. We are held by a vision of God doing 'a new thing' among a challenged people. This is not simply about saving an institution, but about being recaptured by our collective call to know and share the good news of God's love and by a vision for praying and working for the Kingdom of God in the place we now find ourselves.
4. The Covid 19 Pandemic has been overwhelming. Although it has accelerated some elements of decline, it has also opened up new opportunities and new conversations about our future reality.
5. We hope to see God's work of transformation change our communities through acts of kindness, justice and mercy; change our churches through growth in worship, imagination and generosity of spirit; and change our lives through deepening everyday faith in God and reaching out to others with good news.

Next Steps: When?

1. In May 2019 at Diocesan Synod in her Presidential Address, Bishop Christine spoke of a Kairos moment (a critical and opportune moment) from the text of Isaiah 43, and invited us to recognise and respond to God's call to us. The challenges of finance and declining clergy numbers are not a call to do more with less, but a call to do things differently, exploring new partnerships and collaborations between lay and ordained and working across our usual boundaries to find new patterns and ways of working together with others.
2. The Next Steps laid out in this paper stem from a concentrated effort to discern what God is doing among us. They consider how we are being formed and shaped for the future and what we might do to enable and enhance the processes already at work.
3. In many ways God's work of transformation is ongoing in each of us. There are many places which have been learning to adapt to changing circumstances for some time.

There are other parishes and deaneries where emerging ideas are already being explored which align with the direction of our Next Steps. We hope this might be a sign that we are 'working with the grain' of the Spirit and the people in these places.

4. Transformation therefore is not waiting for a date sometime in the future when we might be successful in a bid for more resource. We already see some emerging new partnerships, a new mission imperative in some places, creative responses to community need in others, and risk-taking, sacrifice and generosity at unexpected times and places. And we hope for much more of this. Transformation is already happening. This process of discerning Next Steps is also about a continual sense of being open to God as we journey together.

Next Steps: Values and Priorities

1. In conversation and consultation, we have refreshed our values to reflect the new context of our Next Steps:
 1. **Open to God's transforming love:** rooted and grounded in God's love which flows outward into the world: rooted in our relationship with God, in our deepening prayer and in our growing faith which inspires our continued witnessing to his love.
 2. **Generous with God's transforming gifts:** generous with one another, sharing our gifts as the whole people of God, ordained and lay working in partnership and collaboration; generous in our attitudes, our finances and our resources.
 3. **Engaged in God's transforming work in the world:** engaged in serving our communities and schools, working in partnership in outreach and evangelism, in care and compassion, and in tackling urgent social justice and environmental concerns, locally, nationally and globally.
2. From these values we have developed priorities for our Next Steps which will help focus our energy and resources:
 1. **Bringing Good News:** *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...'* (Luke 4.18)
The Church does not just offer good advice, we bring the good news of Jesus Christ. We want to ensure all our outward facing activities as God's people reflect the priorities of Jesus in Luke 4.18-19. So many of the institutional pressures of finance and decline try and turn us inwards, but we need courage, grace and imagination to keep turning outwards in love and faith. We are good news, and we bring good news, when we are witnessing to God's love through social action, community partnership and mission and evangelism.
 2. **Growing in Christ:** *'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith...'* (Colossians 2.6-7)
So often we might be tempted to think we have made it, that we have got life sorted and nothing needs to change. But we always continue to grow, in our faith and understanding of God, in our calling and vocation, as Paul describes in

Colossians 2.6-7. We never stop following Jesus! We want to offer opportunities for anyone who wants to explore and nurture their faith to do so, and to see 'Everyday Faith' and 'Growing Faith' in our own lives, our households, churches and schools. We also want to develop our discernment, training and support for those engaged in lay or ordained ministry and those exploring ministry.

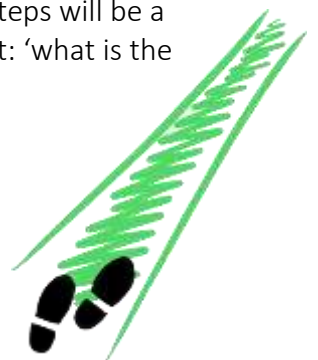
3. **Living Faith Fully:** *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."* (John 10.10)

Jesus is about nothing less than life in all its fullness or abundance! We want to build up each other in the faith, to help each other as we continue to trust in God and step out in faith. This might feel risky from time to time, but we hope to discover God has everything we need. We long for our faith communities to flourish and express God's abundance in our worship, in our care for creation, in our relationships and our common life.

3. These values and priorities have emerged from various conversations, consultations and reflections with a range of people, lay and ordained, representing the life of our diocese, as well as Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod. Comments and reflections continue to be invited as our Next Steps emerge. This process is one of continual discernment of who God is calling us to be and how and where God is leading us forwards.
4. We see these values and priorities reflecting locally the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion:
 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
 3. To respond to human need by loving service
 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Step 1: Understanding Contexts

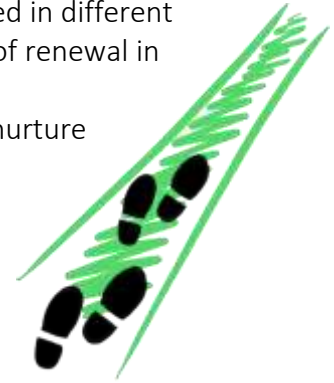
1. We believe that every parish is part of Next Steps. A first step in Next Steps will be a review process to enable a better understanding of each parish context: 'what is the story of mission and ministry in this parish?'
2. Our Next Steps should be guided by considering:
 - Our own lived local knowledge as the People of God here;
 - Our prayerful discernment about where God is calling us;
 - Our close attention and use of the data available to us (including parish returns, population and IMD) as a God-given tool for describing context and discerning forward steps.
3. We are mindful that the effects of Covid 19, both positive and negative, must be borne in mind when understanding the kind of support a parish church may need or can offer to others.



4. A review of each context will ask questions about what are the strengths that should be recognised? What are the gifts might be shared? What support or development is needed? We hope this will be a self-review by each parish, supported as required or appropriate at deanery or diocesan level.

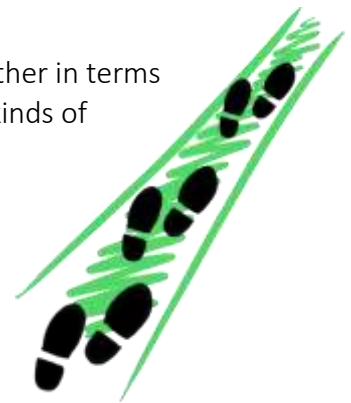
Step 2: Support and Development

1. The Step 1 Review will hopefully identify the kind of support needed in different places. We imagine for some parishes this will include some form of renewal in one, or more, of our priorities:
 1. *Bringing Good News* - this might be help with evangelism, nurture courses, outreach, social action, community development, schools, youth work, pioneering, fresh expressions, etc;
 2. *Growing in Christ* - this might include support in 'Everyday Faith', 'Growing Faith', Authorised Lay Ministry, Youth and Children's work, Guided Prayer, etc;
 3. *Living Faith Fully* - this might include assistance in enhancing worship, governance, lay ministry development, developing Eco-church/environmental work, team working, generous giving, leadership development, ecumenical partnership.
2. In other parishes support might be in Generous Giving or in rethinking the resources available, whether people, ministries, buildings, etc. More significant mutual support and longer-term development will come with the next step below.

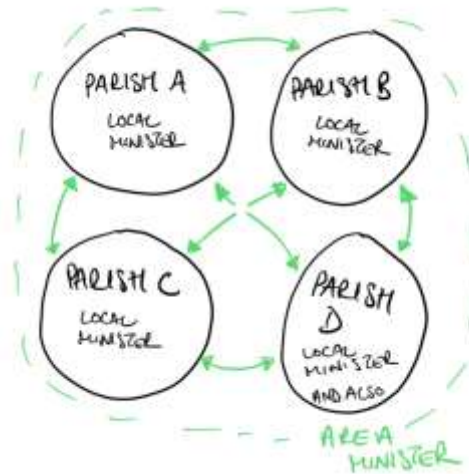


Step 3: Mission Models

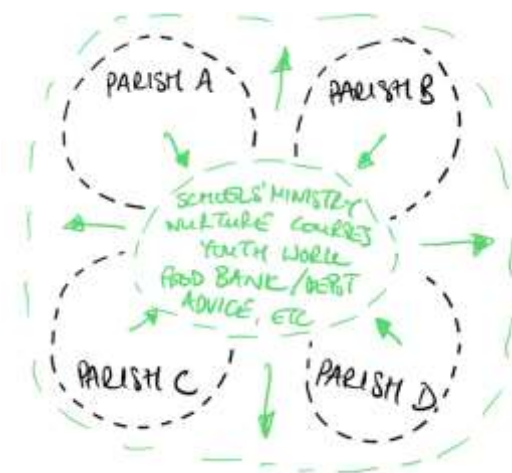
1. The review of context in each place will not take place in isolation either in terms of geography or timing. We are very aware that in many places the kinds of conversations, planning and partnerships we hope for are already happening in parishes and deaneries. Wherever possible we seek 'to work with the grain' of what the Spirit of God is already about in a particular place. We are encouraged by some of the more established or emerging patterns that have been shared with us, and we hope the proposed Mission Models will readily make sense in many places.
2. Alongside Step 2's Support and Development, we have identified three potential models for parish mission and ministry. We hope these Mission Models help us move forward in reimagining mission at a parish, deanery and diocesan level and will build increased capacity for mission, as we witness to God's love and work for the coming of his Kingdom. Our proposed mission models are:
 1. Mission Parishes;
 2. Mission Hubs;
 3. Resourcing Churches.
3. These Mission Models will not be imposed, but will be discerned through active and ongoing dialogue locally and centrally, which in turn will help us foster a new mutual discernment process for the future.



4. **Mission Parishes:** this can be described as a group of parishes working together to build capacity for mission and ministry, with a Local Minister (lay or ordained, stipendiary or self-supporting) in each place and an Area Minister (ordained stipendiary) providing oversight over all and concentrating on an overall outward focus on mission and social engagement.



5. In this model, parishes will be able to support each other where there are gaps (e.g. governance, administration or finance, etc.), but with more focus on building capacity for mission (e.g. shared social outreach, schools work, evangelism initiatives, pastoral care, etc). Mission Parishes will also help discern a shared sense of direction in terms of the use of buildings, ecumenical working, pioneering and church planting, etc.



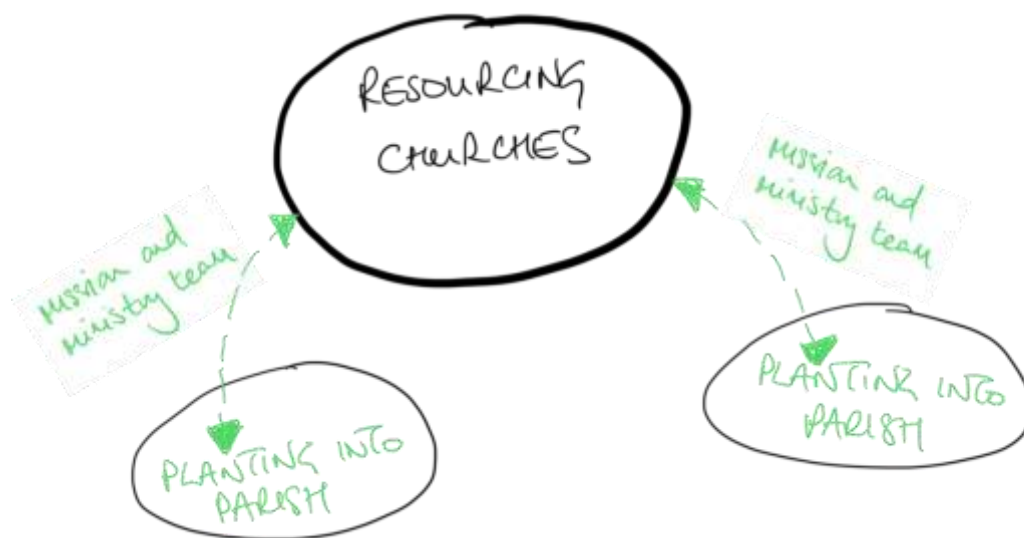
6. There is a sense that Mission Parishes may be the most common model adopted across the diocese. Some deaneries are already working towards something similar, as well as others being able to draw on the good experience from Groups or Team Ministries.

7. **Mission Hubs:** this can be described as parish churches gathered around a central church hub which supports mission and ministry in each place. Again, there is a sense of mutuality in relationships where, drawing on the language of Scripture, the 'stronger' may well support the 'weaker', but where also the 'smaller' may have something significant to contribute to the 'larger'.



8. This model may lend itself more easily to a market town/rural setting, but not necessarily exclusively so. Sunday worship may not happen in every parish every week but mission, worship, outreach activity is supported during the week in all parishes (which may include parishes of very low population, or more remote location). In previous times this kind of model has been described as a 'Minster Church model'.

9. It is imagined there will be a stipendiary priest in the mission hub, possibly with a team of other lay and ordained ministers, and that there will be some form of local minister in the other parishes, though in smaller or more remote population settings this may be a named contact.
10. **Resourcing Churches:** this describes churches which are able to support planting new ministry and mission into other parishes which has been identified appropriately or is requesting this support. This may be in the form of planting a new congregation, offering resource for a new missional partnership, or rekindling mission in some other way. It will involve a team of people being sent out to plant a new faith community.
11. Although St Thomas Newcastle is our first resource church plant, we hope other churches in the diocese, across our different traditions, can develop as Resourcing Churches with the right encouragement.



12. These three Mission Models may not be mutually exclusive and we would expect overlap and interaction in this new mixed ecology, as we discern and explore together appropriate new patterns for mission, and perhaps develop other models.
13. It may also be that these Mission Models are not be the end point of the journey but a stage of development on the way.
14. All these steps, and especially the Mission Models, require the living out of our values in more tangible ways as we are open to God and one another, as we are generous with the gifts we have, and as we engage in the work of the Kingdom of God together.

Conclusion

1. Luke 10 has been a key text in much of the Core Team's reflection:

'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. ² 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. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.'

2. Jesus sent out the seventy in pairs – no one was sent out alone. We believe this principle of partnership is key: we are called into partnership with God in mission to the world, we are called together as the Body of Christ, and we are called to collaborate – we bring peace. Though Next Steps seeks to value parishes, this is journey which calls for the lowering of boundaries, a building up of church in a spirit of understanding, openness and generosity.
3. Next Steps continues to be an emerging piece of work and this is very much a working discussion document. It describes some of the next steps of our journey, but there will be other 'moving parts' which will play into Next Steps. Many other helpful conversations continue to emerge. Moving forward, engagement with deaneries, and particularly deanery development groups, is a priority, as is our continuing prayer.

Next Steps Core Team
18/03/2021