

***'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

God is always calling us to himself as his beloved people and sending us out to witness to his love in our praying and working for his Kingdom. This dual calling and sending requires our continual listening, discerning and renewing in the Holy Spirit as we step out in faith. In May 2019, Bishop Christine helped us recognise a Kairos Moment in our mission and ministry believing that God is *'doing a new thing'* (Isaiah 43.19) in us and through us.

For the last two years, in the midst of the Covid 19 Pandemic, we have been listening and discerning our ***Next Steps*** as a ***growing church bringing hope*** in Newcastle Diocese: seeking together God's guidance and renewing. This journey has included much prayer and reflection, discussions in person and over Zoom, consultations and theological reflection.

The journey has been supported by the National Church's Strategy Unit to help us develop a programme for strategic transformation to realise the *'new thing'* God is calling us into and to attract national funding to support this. Prayers, discussions, consultations and reflections from across the diocese discerned a vision for six themes:

- Turning outwards in mission in every place
- Energised and equipped missional leaders, ordained and lay
- New Christian Communities and new Christians
- Making disciples who build up the Church for mission
- More children, young people and mission with schools
- Financial flourishing: giving generously, planning strategically, building sustainably

These themes support our ***Next Steps*** for strategic transformation, a programme that puts God's renewing of our people and our culture at the heart of change. Our submission and presentation to the National Church's Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was considered on 21<sup>st</sup> October in the hope we would be invited to develop a final application to SIB for significant funding to implement the plan.

Unfortunately, we have not won the confidence of the National Church and the SIB has decided not to invite us to continue to develop and refine our Next Steps transformation programme. We are deeply disappointed with this outcome.

However, it is important for us to recognise ***Next Steps*** is not a plan that depends solely on a decision or funding from the National Church. We are determined to continue the journey God is calling us on but now need to consider afresh *how* we take our ***Next Steps*** on the way.

As ever, we are being called to have more faith and more trust that God *'will make a way'* as we navigate a different course to the one we had hoped for. We continue to pray for a flourishing diocese in all our contexts so that we might be, in the words of the first Bishop of Newcastle, *'a centre of life, of prayer, of work for the Master, in fuller measure than ever before...'* (from the inaugural sermon of Bishop Ernest Wilberforce, 1882).

Bishop Christine and I are so grateful for your prayers, wisdom, enthusiasm and support; we rejoice in all that God has given and is doing and renewing among us as we journey together: *'since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.'* (2 Corinthians 4.1)

+ Mark Berwick

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021