

## Change, serve, grow – the emerging diocesan vision

Work on the diocesan vision and strategy is at a pivotal stage, with an exciting and integrated plan being developed.

At its heart is a commitment to creating and supporting a **flourishing and well-resourced parish structure to grow God's kingdom** across north and west Kent, Medway and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley as:

**Seeking first the kingdom of God, we are called together to grow, change and serve with courage, compassion and creativity.**

### Working out what living out this vision means

That is exactly what diocesan colleagues and senior leaders have been doing since Bishop Jonathan came to the diocese with his three themes of change, serve and grow.

They've also been listening - to parishes, to church leaders, and the Holy Spirit.

It has led to the identifying of some key objectives within the overall vision to help guide and focus work. These are to grow **missional churches**, with **missional leaders** and **missional disciples**, that are:

- Growing younger and more diverse
- Growing spiritually and numerically
- Impacting their communities
- Releasing financial resources for mission
- Planting and growing new missional churches
- Creating a safe and healthy culture for all



These have been shaped and defined by taking stock of where we are as a diocesan-family; our challenges and opportunities, what the different contexts are, and identifying what has and is going well.

### What has been learned

Drawing all this engagement together has identified that the wealth of cultures and demographics in the diocese is huge.

The benefits, actual and potential, for mission and ministry flow from this rich mix; a mix which represents some of the most prosperous and poorest areas of the country, including a range of contexts, from estates, urban and suburban, to rural areas.

Plus, we're currently experiencing the largest housing boom since the post war era, with a population growth expected from 1.4 million to 1.7 million by the 2040s.

Add to this some specific challenges not uncommon to other dioceses:

- Decline in usual Sunday attendance leading to a decline in volunteers
- Decline in adult attendance meaning fewer families, children and young people
- The unique challenges of estates and rural ministry having not been matched by consistent diocesan support or investment
- Decline in Parish Offer due to the pandemic and external economic forces restricting funds for mission and ministry

### **Building on what has worked well**

The good news is that growth is and can happen, decline is not inevitable, and there is much to be hopeful about.

How do we know? Through the lived experiences of parishes.

Experience from parishes like St Augustine's Slade Green, that 5 years ago was in a vulnerable place in terms of its worshipping community.

Thanks to targeted support from diocesan colleagues, the church team were supported with a vision and mission plan which identified a clear focus on children and family work.

Strategic Development Funding was secured which helped employ a Children and Families worker, and today, the church is a vibrant place, engaging with 30 to 40 families a week.



### **A counter cultural plan**

Learning from experience like this, has helped to formulate an ambitious, hope-filled, and refreshed Called Together vision, which seeks to support what is happening at the grassroots in parishes

It's not a 'points of light' plan where only a few benefit but an integrated vision for operational and cultural change across a broad range of areas and work to respond to the Spirit's call for our diocese.

It's counter cultural to the general Church of England narrative because this is not about 'how much do we have, so what can we do?'

**Rather it is, 'What are we being called to do and be, and let's make it happen!'**

## Making it happen

How will the vision do this? Through four key workstreams that have been identified:

- Missional Leadership Development** – Supporting clergy and lay people at all stages of their ministry, through learning opportunities, networking and development, and support for their well-being, to ensure we have missional leaders now and going forward.
- Missionally healthy churches** – It is clear that there are some places that are really struggling both missionally and practically that just need targeted support to help them, to ensure all can flourish and have 'life in all its fullness'. (John 10:10)
- Children and Young people** – To counter the national shortage of trained children and youth workers – both paid and volunteers - learning opportunities will be provided at every level to build up skill in this area, to encourage sharing of great work and how to go about it.
- Revitalising fragile churches** - There are places where God is at work, and where a little bit more investment will catalyse the potential already underway.



This vision can't be realised all at once, and so it will be phased over several years.

Financial support will also be needed from elsewhere to see it carried out in fully, which includes a substantial bid to the Church Commissioners in February 2025.

However, the 2025 budget has been planned to support as much of this work as possible - it's why the generosity of the Parish Offer, and support of the Common Fund, is so vital.

## Be part of it

Every person has a part to play in this vision to bring about God's kingdom, lay or ordained.

Like those pilgrims who have gone before us, you are invited to join this generational opportunity to work together to respond to the Holy Spirits call for this diocese.

As this plan goes forward to Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod in December, please pray, please consider your generosity of giving, and please join this pilgrimage for the glory of God.