



WALKING *the Wessex Way*

WALKING THE WESSEX WAY COMMITMENTS

WALKING THE WESSEX WAY: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:

Towards the end of Walking the Wessex Way we find these words:

All of that is the heritage in which we stand today: one of **servicing, learning, growing and loving**. It is a heritage which has shaped not just this diocese, but this country and the wider world. It is a legacy of grace, which should lead us on into the future.

And it is a **Christ-centred heritage**: our **servicing** has been – and must be – a **servicing** like Christ; our **learning** has been – and must be – a **learning** of Christ; our **growing** has been – and must be – a **growing** into Christ; and our **loving** has been and must be a **loving** in the name of Christ. It is a **Christ-centred heritage** which must lead us on into a **Christ-centred future**.

Walking the Wessex Way then goes on to describe ‘A Christ-Centred future’:

Servicing – Christlike engagement with our communities, bringing peace, hope and reconciliation.

Learning – deepening our discipleship as followers of Christ.

Growing – the renewal of the Church as the Body of Christ.

Loving – making the loving presence of Jesus known in our midst, as his body.

The document then concludes with an invitation to local Christian communities to ask how they might make this tangibly evident where they are.

We should be clear that the main task of making these things evident does indeed fall to such communities: there is only so much change that can be leveraged centrally.

Nonetheless there are things that can and should be done from the diocesan ‘centre’. This document is the response of the Bishop’s Staff Team to that invitation, and attempts to give expression to some of those things, expressing them as commitments: our commitments to the wider diocese for this next season.

What follows is a summary of the Commitments from the Bishop’s Staff Team (BST) in response to Walking the Wessex Way. By necessity it is a document that is under regular review, being tweaked and updated as our context and challenges change. It is shared for information and does not form part of the formal consultation process. That being said, the BST always welcomes any feedback and reflections on these commitments and their support for local church communities.

Serving



As a diocese we are committed to be valued partners in working with and for our local communities, the county of Hampshire and our part of BCP, and the wider Communion, learning from them and sharing the love of Jesus in deed as well as in word.

In that context too we will do all we can to safeguard the integrity of God's good creation.

To that end we will:

- Ensure that key diocesan leaders are trusted partners with civic authorities, consciously occupying the 'public square' in partnership with them (*Ongoing*)
- Review and refresh our Communion links ensuring they are properly mutual and that learning from them is disseminated well across the diocese (*By mid 2025*)
- Continue to develop and then deliver our creation care strategy, supporting parishes, schools and worshipping communities to achieve Net Zero Carbon (*By 2030*)
- Commission a strategic review of our Church Buildings, seeking to develop a Diocesan Church Buildings' Strategy which balances the needs of our communities, against available resources, heritage concerns, and environmental commitments (*By 2026*)

Learning



As a diocese we are committed to ensure that we are engaging effectively in ministerial formation and attending to clergy well-being for a faithful and fruitful Church in the changing landscape of the third decade of the 21st C.

We are committed to learning how our culture may be shaped by the gospel so it is inclusive of all.

To that end we will:

- Establish a Mission and Ministry Council and Team, under the oversight of the Bishop of Southampton, to enable ministerial formation and development (including CMD) especially in the five areas identified in the Appendix to this document (*By Easter 2025*)
- Action the recommendations of the clergy well-being group to maximise clergy well-being *by Easter 2025* and repeat the survey (*By January 2026*)
- Review of our approach to disability and inclusion issues and address priorities (*By April 2025*)
- Appoint a Diocesan Adviser in Women's Ministry (*By March 2025*)
- Deliver our Racial Justice strategy (to be presented to Synod in November 2024) (*Ongoing*)
- Depending on the above consider the establishment of an 'Enabling all-church' council chaired by a member of BST (*By Christmas 2025*)

Growing



As a diocese we are committed to reverse the tragic decline in children and young people from the life of our churches, taking full advantage of the gift that our Church schools are to us.

Recognising that abuse is antithetical to the gospel and to human flourishing we will also do all we can to mainstream good practice in safeguarding into the life of the diocese.

To that end we will:

- Receive the recommendations and KPIs of the 'Growing Younger' working group and ensure they form part of the Diocesan Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan, including:
 - better integration of our schools and nurseries in the life of the diocese
 - developing intergenerational communities
 - seeking further opportunities to serve in schools, further and higher education
 - ensuring all ministers have opportunities to be skilled in ministry with children and young people
 - Apply for national funding to implement the strategy and see a step change in our engagement with the missing generations
 - Ensure there is 100% compliance in safeguarding training for church officers (*By Easter 2025*)
 - Further develop a programme for the support of Parish Safeguarding Officers (*By Easter 2025*)
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Loving



As a diocese we are committed to ensure that God's Church is the best that we can be, expressing, through our parishes, chaplaincies and schools, the loving presence of Jesus in our midst.

To that end we will:

- Refresh and renew our approach to prayer as a diocese
- Receive the recommendations and KPIs of the 'Growing Younger' working group and ensure they form part of the Diocesan Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan, including:
 - Intelligent analysis of the benefice Health & Vitality data so as to identify areas for investment, support and revitalisation
 - Identify key strategies (such as Natural Church Development and Partnership for Missional Church, Lead Academy) to help parishes across the diocese discern God's call for them in mission and ministry and further develop as faithful and fruitful churches and communities
 - Apply for national funding to deliver targeted revitalisation

- To keep under review our allocation and deployment of all ministerial resources, ensuring as far as possible a just and fair allocation of resources across the very varied demographic landscape of our diocese to ensure that all of 1.25m people have access to a vibrant, loving local church (*Ongoing*)
 - Ensure careful stewardship of our financial resources, growing income to help sustain our mission (*Ongoing*)
 - To continue to grow, refresh and develop the support the Diocesan Team provides to parishes, volunteers and ministers, developing our online library of resources, annual training programmes, and general support to help parishes respond to their changing contexts and statutory obligations (*Ongoing*)
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APPENDIX

A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT IN THE DIOCESE OF WINCHESTER:

Introduction:

It can feel as if we are in a challenging time to be God's Church, and to minister within it: but perhaps it always has been so, and we are simply now more awake to it. Our God remains faithful and calls us to faithfulness ourselves. As we consider how ministry might develop in changing times, we must recognise the traditions of the Church, and the foundations upon which they are built, celebrating so much that is good in our inherited patterns of parish ministry, whilst also being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the present, ready to be creative, to be innovative and to change, that we may be the best we can be in our current context.

What then might such ministry look like?

A Foundational Conviction:

The framework that follows is founded upon the theological conviction that the whole people of God (and not just some within it) are called to engage in ministry and mission.

This is evident in 1 Peter 2: 9, *'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'* (NRSV). And this is not simply a New Testament emphasis as these words directly echo Exodus 19: 5 & 6: *'You shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples... you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation'* (NRSV).

Ministry and mission is the calling and task of the whole people of God, yet within the Church of God some are called to particular roles to enable all God's people to be obedient to that calling. This is clear in Ephesians 4: 11-13:

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (NRSV).

This emphasis, and the specific words above from 1 Peter, are echoed in the Ordinal (in words which are repeated in the introduction to all three services for the ordination of deacons, priests and bishops, so foundational a principle is it):

God calls his people to follow Christ, and forms us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation, to declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the whole Church is summoned to witness to God's love and to work for the coming of his kingdom.

To serve this royal priesthood, God has given a variety of ministries...

The enabling and equipping of the whole people must be a clear priority for all those called into recognised ministries and therefore within their training and formation. However, within this critical context I discern five specific priorities for ministry development in the Diocese of Winchester:

Oversight ministry:

Multiple studies of church health and growth identify the quality of leadership as critical. It is vital therefore that we invest in such leadership, ensuring it is of the highest quality: hopeful, faithful, visionary, missional, creative and compassionate *to equip the saints for the work of ministry.*

In particular we must ensure that those who are called to ministry as incumbents are skilled, envisioned, and equipped to exercise oversight over the greater whole, attending rightly to its whole life and health, whether that be in a single-church parish, or a multiparish benefice.

Such an emphasis is clear from the words from Ephesians above, especially as they relate to pastors and teachers. Furthermore, it is also clear from the Ordinal that,

[Priests] share with the Bishop in the oversight of the Church, delighting in its beauty and rejoicing in its well-being.

(In particular it should be noted that oversight ministry is not the sole preserve of the bishop.)

In the Diocese of Winchester therefore we need to give fresh weight and emphasis to raising up a new cohort of people called and equipped to exercise this critical ministry of oversight, to ensure both the fruitfulness and sustainability of our churches, parishes and benefices.

Local ministry:

Ephesians has perhaps the highest ecclesiology of any of the Pauline epistles. Everything it says about the Church applies to it in its one, holy, catholic, and apostolic identity. And yet, for all that, the epistle is locally rooted, as both its salutation and valediction make clear. The Church of God must always be expressed locally in a particular place. For us in the Church of England that will be primarily (although not exclusively) in a parish context.

This interplay between the catholic and the parochial is captured in the Ordinal, in the service for the consecration of Bishops:

Thus formed into a single communion of faith and love, the Church in each place and time is united with the Church in every place and time.

And bishops and priests are both asked:

Will you lead Christ's people in proclaiming his glorious gospel, so that the good news of salvation may be heard in every place?

Oversight, ultimately, is needed at every level in the life of the Church – universal, national, diocesan, and at benefice and parish level. Specifically, however, local congregations flourish best when they have clearly identified leadership, and in the Diocese of Winchester we need to give ourselves intentionally to develop a significant number of such local leaders *so that the good news of salvation may be heard in every place.*

Ministry on the margins – and beyond:

Ephesians makes it clear that God's ultimate purpose '*as a plan for the fulness of time, [is] to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth*' (2:10 NRSV). It is in that ultimate eschatological and missional perspective that the ministry of the Church must be understood.

Thus (for example) in the Ordinal we are told that deacons:

...are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.

Some ministers have a particular calling to do just that and to discover what shape the gospel might take in such contexts, bringing fresh life to traditional contexts as well as initiating entirely new ventures for the Kingdom of God. In the missional context of the 21st C we badly need such people and are all the poorer without the vision, energy, creativity and prophetic imagination they bring with them. Further, these gifts are of immense significance for the wider church, given that its future depends upon such innovative instincts in a rapidly changing world.

In the Diocese of Winchester we need intentionally to nurture and encourage the ministry of such entrepreneurial people, creating a context in which they can be celebrated and flourish.

Youth and children's ministry:

We return again to this vision of the Church in Ephesians 4:

...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

It is to our discredit that, when we envisage such a community, we tend to exclude children and young people (and indeed the elderly) from it.

Similarly it is to our discredit that when we read that:

The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit

we do not include children and young people within our mental image. We are all the poorer for such an omission.

The facts speak for themselves. Our loss of children and young people from our churches is close to catastrophic. But we must recognise that the loss is not only theirs, but ours too. We are all the poorer and weaker without the gift of young people and children in our midst.

In the Diocese of Winchester we need all (and not just some) ministers of the gospel to be able to welcome this gift, not least through the medium of our Church schools.

Chaplaincy:

The ministry of chaplaincy is very much of our time: the stresses of contemporary life, falling church attendance, and the missional opportunity to be present in places of need are a powerful combination.

The Ordinal says that *deacons are to serve the community in which they are set, bringing to the Church the needs and hopes of all the people* and emphasises the essential servant nature of such a calling, following in Jesus' footsteps:

And now we give you thanks
that you have called these your servants,
whom we ordain in your name,
to share as deacons in the ministry of the gospel of Christ,
who came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Chaplaincy epitomises the essence of this incarnational service within a community context (our schools included) and deserves specific attention in the Diocese of Winchester, that we may give better expression to the loving presence of Jesus in such places.