



May 2018

Note: The paragraph numbers refer to the accompanying PowerPoint® Slides

Growing in Christ

1. The church has an urgent challenge. Many churches today, especially those in our benefice, look rather like this, sparse... but there are some exceptions that look more like this...



2. Gorsley Baptist Church and Holy Trinity Cheltenham being notable examples. So, what's our diocese offering to help us attract others?

3. The problem goes back at least to the Reformation in the 16th century, when the excesses of Roman Catholicism were destroyed. Before then, the rich murals and statues, and the ritual in mysterious Latin, were seen as a foretaste of heaven, hence you went through the screen and symbolically joined with its saints in the rich, heaven-like sanctuary beyond to receive the 'actual' body and blood of Christ.



Everything except the Creed and Lord's Prayer, which you learnt for confirmation, were said by the priest on your behalf and, with the advent of the classical and baroque eras, even the music became ornate, composed by Mozart and Bach etc and sung on your behalf by a choir. All meant to reflect heaven.

In the Reformation, this was seen as idolatrous, so was swept away and replaced with plain whitewashed walls, often with the pulpit placed front centre to focus on scripture as it was read and preached. Everyday common language was used without hymns, only metrical psalms, in case the words of hymns written by humans were accidentally blasphemous. As a result, for most people, God lost his mystery, the ornate murals, stained glass windows, ritual and music that had made religion literally awesome for them had been removed.

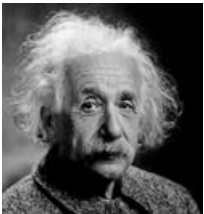


Faith and church membership gradually declined from thereon but was maintained to some extent by superstition and tradition, and occasionally by coercion, such as in Victorian times when you couldn't get a job or be accepted into society unless you went to church.



4. This accelerated in the 1960s when there was a sea change in popular culture and attitude with the advent of pop music and less reverence to the established norms – That Was The Week, That Was on TV, etc.

The established church tried to respond by introducing music groups and updating its ritual, but it often failed to attract modern young people and it put-off the older, regular members who liked it as it was, so attendance declined even more.



5. So, what do we need to do? Albert Einstein famously defined lunacy as, “Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. If we want to be somewhere different from where we are now we need to do something different.

6. Some years ago, the C of E and Methodists, joined later by many free churches, began a movement called Mission Shaped Ministry (MSM), arising from reports of committees that had looked into the current and future needs of the church, especially its outreach. It's interesting that they use a rucksack as a logo, at the same time indicative of a journey and of people on the move.



There's even a bishop dedicated to overseeing it – bishop Graham Cray.



7. Mission Shaped Ministry found that we should stop asking “How do we get more people *into* church?” and ask instead “How can we get *out* there and engage with people where they are?” More about that below.

And don't try to guess what people would like and provide it, then wonder why they don't come. We need to build a relationship with them over a period, then ask *them* what they'd support – what day / time / style / venue and help *them* provide it for themselves, so they own it – and it'll probably be significantly different from what we're used to, as we'll also see below.

MSM has found that today, (i) successful initiatives involve food or drink and (ii) from inception to full fruition is likely to take up to 5 years.



25. Before he went off sick, Andy Sewell, identified a need and asked Roger Parker to create a ‘Benefice Children's Group’ to co-ordinate and promote our work in that area.

So far it comprises the leaders of our current children's work (from Dymock, Redmarley and Oxenhall), but we would welcome others. We've met three times and determined:

- i) Who already does what, where and when?
- ii) What would we like to do if we had unlimited resources?
- iii) Where can we get new resources from?

It was suggested we should speak to the Headteachers – can we involve parents? And we agreed we need to develop new leaders, we can't keep asking those already leading to do even more. So, we've realise we urgently need to pursue the Discipleship-Building activities mentioned above and are happy to take a lead in trying to get that off the ground.



26. **Benefice Plan:** Summarising then, it would seem a good idea to develop a united ‘Benefice Plan’ with immediate attention on finding:


- A Focus Leader in every parish to help move things forward.
- To develop and grow our own discipleship before we try to reach out to others and invite them to get involved.
- To support the activities of the Benefice Children's Group.
- Following-up the idea of engaging through a meal or refreshments: – it's been suggested we introduce a simple breakfast before the monthly Benefice Communion to help build fellowship, mutual support, and the sharing of experiences (Lunch after that Service was first suggested but that has added difficulties).
- Once we've got these ideas underway, give attention to who and how we plan to engage with current non-churchgoers, invite them to informal meals and discussions and to develop their own ideas for worshipping in their own style, under the umbrella of, and as an integral part of, our existing benefice.

If they want to go on, they can then join regular churchgoers using the main Modules and join-in their discussion without being overwhelmed.

Engagement has 4 subcategories:

23. *Combating injustice, environmental destruction, exclusion & isolation:* is fundamental to Christianity but open to criticism of the church meddling in politics, so we need to be careful, it includes the whole gambit of charity work. We're all well aware of many activities in this area but 'LIFE' encourages every parish to take an active role in society, partly because as a Christian we should 'love our neighbour as our-self' and partly so as not to be seen as aloof or detached.

Using Sport, music and the arts to share faith: is good for contacting young people and our diocese has several ideas for this:

 In the summer of 2018, the diocese is running 'FestivALL' with a whole load of activities in this category that we're encouraged to join in with and take our friends, not least football in the cathedral nave! As part of that, our deanery is partnering with PSALMS, a well-established outreach group in the Stroud area that reaches out to youngsters through Christian sports coaches, and Pauntley school uses the similar 'Roaring Rugby' group who gave a presentation at one of our recent Men's Breakfasts.




We may be able to develop our music and arts work with the help of our current music leaders, and Arts and Crafts through several of our members who already do that in our benefice children's groups.

Connection with new housing developments: doesn't currently have much relevance in our benefice but there's large developments elsewhere in the diocese and small development planned for Newent.

24. *Investment in people and programmes that excite young people:* this does have potential in our benefice.

In particular, our deanery is pursuing a full-time chaplain to ease the move of teenagers from our primary schools, where we have an established contact with pupils, to secondary school where currently we have little or no contact, and any 'spare time' they may have will be available to assist our parishes with our outreach to young people.

And we have a number of activities with young people which we may be able to develop.

 8. The Church of England is therefore well aware of the problem of declining attendance and has put a lot of effort into researching a meaningful solution, including trying different ways at different times over recent years, not all with success.

Based on this experience, the current focus is a 'Renewal & Reform Programme' that aims to build on the three goals articulated by General Synod in 2010, ie:

- **To contribute** as the national church to the common good
- **To facilitate** the growth of the church in numbers and depth of discipleship
- **To re-imagine** the church's ministry


Most denominations long ago adopted the Anglican 'Five Marks of Mission' which help us measure how we're doing:

We should strive to:

- **Proclaim** the good news of the kingdom
- **Teach**, nurture and baptise new believers
- **Respond** to human need by loving service
- **Seek** to transform unjust structures in society
- **Strive** to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth.

9. Our diocese is conscious that one of its principal roles is to assist the parishes in every way, so in 2011 it produced a 5-year Vision combining those principles to focus our efforts, called 'Journeying Together'.



 That expired in 2016 and has been replaced with the current Vision called 'LIFE' based on the experience gained over those five years, together with a consultation made with over 6,000 parishioners on what is needed now.

Most reported a need to stem the rot and build membership. By doing that we address many of the other problems, such as the lack of income to maintain our expensive old buildings and to pay our vicar's stipend, which every PCC is responsible for paying through the 'Parish Share'.

10. The 'LIFE' Vision focuses our attention into four categories: **L**eadership, **I**magination, **F**aith, and **E**ngagement. So, let's look at the Vision in some detail, as by following its guidance we should grow our membership.

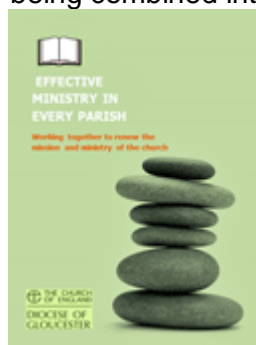
Leadership has 3 subcategories:

Developing diverse lay and ordained leaders: because no Incumbent can do it all on their own, especially in a 'multi-parish benefice'.

Piloting liberating models of leadership and ministry: The Diocese no longer requires 3 or more years of academic study for even the most junior leader but takes account of a person's existing training and experience and the nature of the post; eg: a Sunday School teacher needs different training from a Bereavement Councillor.

Creating learning networks: the current diocesan training programs are designed to do this; as they're implemented, so experience is shared.

11. How can we implement this ideal? The idea of a priest in every parish is a fallacy, there never were enough priests to do that, and there's even less today, which means more and more parishes are being combined into a multi-parish benefice.



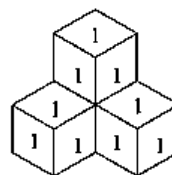
Consequently, the previous Diocesan Vision, Journeying Together, had a programme called 'Effective Ministry in Every Parish' (EMEP) that recognised the need for someone to become 'A Focus Leader in Every Parish', and the current Vision, 'LIFE,' maintains that approach. Who might such a leader be?

Someone known in the parish and committed to working in a team:

- A Priest (Full, part-time or retired)
- A Lay Reader
- A Local Ministry Team Member or
- Someone recognised as a leader and 'Called Out' by the congregation, such as Ruth Blandford at Preston.

Faith has 3 subcategories:

21. *New depths of prayer and spiritual growth:* If we're going to reach out to outsiders we need to be able to explain our own faith. The traditional way of doing that has long been by various study courses such as 'Alpha' or 'Emmaus' but, apart from a very few regulars, no-one in our benefice comes to courses and that has proved common throughout our Deanery. When asked at a recent Deanery Synod, 80% of the parishes said they don't have any House Groups. Mission Shaped Ministry has addressed that problem and found that a much less formal way, usually including a meal, is more successful as it matches the general relaxation of formality in society today.



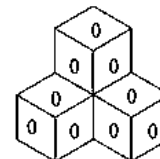
Creating Confident Disciples: Applying the principal to grow our own discipleship, we can include an informal meal, and there's several sources of data we can use to facilitate discussion; one piloted in our benefice is called 'Modulo' – a series of modules, one for each session.

For regular churchgoers, it looks briefly at the familiar Old and New Testament stories and then encourages discussion to consider how they apply to us today, with sample questions and answers if required.

22. *Sharing our Stories in a Different Way:* For non-churchgoers we need a slightly different approach, inviting them to the same groups as experienced churchgoers would be unproductive for everyone.

We need first to make personal contact. A good way is by joining a local club or organisation such as a cricket, tennis or Bridge club, or the Mother's Union, or WI, at the school gate when dropping off children, or through church socials. Many of our current congregations are already involved in such organisations.

After we've made contact and grown a relationship, invite them to share a meal or some other refreshment in an informal setting and introduce the concept of faith. Modulo has a 'pre-module' for that purpose designed to create a 'Firm Foundation'. It addresses the six most asked questions discovered in research done by Coventry University:



Who is God (does he exist and what's he like)? Who am I? How can I be happy? What is the spiritual world? Why is there suffering? and What happens when I die?

19. ...in places where the church is now remote from the centre of population, but that population has a hall with toilet and kitchen facilities – Bromesberrow, Donnington, Pauntley and Upleadon for instance – then this example from Devon is relevant. Their church is remote from the village, but the Village Hall is in the centre, so they turned 'Remote Church' into 'Local Church' by holding a traditional Service in the Village Hall on a Sunday afternoon, with refreshments after to provide fellowship, and its proved very popular, especially with older people who found getting to the remote church difficult.



20. Here's another option which has become very popular throughout the country. When Lucy More and her family moved to Portsmouth they went to their local Family Service but found it "dire".



She asked around the congregation and found they had several people with craft skills, and her enquiries at the school gate showed 3:30pm after school on a Thursday was favoured, so she started 'Messy Church' with various crafts and games, followed by very informal worship in their adjacent church and a simple meal for the attendees and homecoming fathers who join them after work – Spaghetti Bolognese or Sausage and Mash, for instance, with cake for desert which they make as one of the crafts. Their rule is no child can come unless accompanied by an adult, so they get parents and grandparents too, who join in the fun.



In a similar vein, Redmarley haven't had children at their Family Service for a long time but one of their members knows about bird-song and nature, so they recently tried a dawn walk through the woods starting at 7:30am with bacon baps and informal worship in a member's kitchen afterwards – they got 10 children and their non-regular church-going parents, so they're planned to develop this, again with informal worship afterwards.



Such a person is seen as essential to bringing a focus to the work of each parish, especially its outreach and pastoral care, thus freeing the Incumbent to share their time between the multiple parishes more effectively... and so be able to engage with more parishioners.

Imagination has 4 subcategories:

12. *Investing in Baptism Families – Creating Amazing Adventures*, especially for young people.



Andy Sewell recognised the need and spoke to Caroline Dunnett, who agreed to undergo some additional training after her basic Reader course to become a benefice focus to liaise with, and prepare, candidates for baptism along with their parents and Godparents.

As an RE Teacher used to working with secondary school youth, she's also provided 'amazingly adventurous' church activities suited to youth, including Easter night sleepovers with video, discussion and BBQ in her house, and leading our youth in investigating how they want to worship today, so helping them create our Contemporary Evening Service 'Ignite' held on the third Sunday of the month.



13. *Placing schools at the heart of our outreach*: Bishop Rachel is keen on this as young people are the future of the church. We used do quite well here, although it's never been equal across our benefice, but there are now some threats.

Tony Lomas and Lara Bloom used to lead a weekly Assembly in all four of our church schools but there was a period after they left when no-one did, and church involvement is a requirement for such schools. Before Lara came, Roger Parker went into Ann Cam school for ½ a term with Tony doing the other ½, and Tony went into our other 3 schools. Since Tony and Lara left, Roger has been going into Ann Cam full time and Jill Bond into Redmarley; both having declared "Until a substitute is found." John Furst, Bromesberrow's retired priest, is going into that school on a similar condition, but no-one is currently going into Pauntley School.

David Clowes has advised that the 'Open the Book' team for Ann Cam, (weekly dramatised Bible readings), is reducing in numbers due to aging and is likely to give up altogether at the end of the 2018 summer Term. There's never been 'Open the Book' at our other three schools.



There is, however, some good news. All four of our schools continue to come into our respective churches for their end of term Services.



Our Deanery, in conjunction with the PSALMS group from Stroud, has arranged a sports and faith sharing event called 'Pulse Games' for our 8 Deanery church schools this summer, but our benefice couldn't find anyone prepared to support them in our schools, so our four won't be taking part.

Our Deanery is negotiating a 3-year grant from the diocese to fund a full-time youth chaplain to aid the passage of our children from primary to secondary education and Newent School has agreed to house them.



14. *Bold and Creative Use of Buildings:* Again, there's a variable response across our benefice but generally our buildings are in better condition than in many benefices. Grants are available as Dymock discovered – they've spent approx £81,000 in the last seven years to maintain and

update their building with the help of considerable grants to supplement fund-raising from the village.

It would be good, therefore, if each parish had a costed and scheduled plan to make their building more suited to the 21st century, so there's a sound base from which to reach out to others – toilet, kitchen, etc.



15. *Encouraging new and courageous ways of worshipping:* when we do reach out. We learnt above how, in the past, the Church of England experimented with modernising our Services without attracting more people but losing some of its existing members instead.

It's now realised that we're not going to attract modern youngsters to traditional Services at 9:30 or 10:00 on a Sunday morning, so we need to keep those Services for those of us who like it and add something more in a different style, day and time to suit them – a 'Fresh Expression' of church. Mission Shaped Ministry has put a lot of research into that which is bearing good fruit. There follows examples of what's been successful around the country taken from their 'Fresh Expressions' DVD.



16. It used to be thought wrong to 'split' the congregation into separate parts but it's now accepted that today's society no longer expects everyone to do everything the same way – people no longer look at what everyone else is wearing and follow suit but we wear a huge variety of different styles all at the same time, and so it is with the church. It's now thought better to have 5 groups of 6 people worshipping at different times and in different styles, but allied to the same parish, than just one group of 10, it's called 'Cell Church'.



This is a group of young people with similar tastes meeting in someone's house for very informal worship. There may well be other groups in parallel meeting on a different day, at a different time, in a different venue and worshipping in a different style.



17. This is a group of unemployed people in Liverpool who meet on a Friday morning to make bread, which they sell to fund themselves, and whilst they're there get help with job-hunting, form-filling etc, then they gather to share Holy Communion using the bread they've just made.



18. If you've got people of different backgrounds, they'll almost certainly prefer to do things differently. Here's a group of Asian people whose tradition is to share food when they meet together. Here they're sharing food sitting on sofas and each go separately to help themselves to consecrated Naan Bread and Wine from a table acting as an Altar to add to their meal when they feel ready.

If all that's a bit radical for you, that's the point. We need to keep the traditional things we like and find out what others who don't come would like instead. People are still very spiritual, look at the quantity of flowers left at the scene of an accident for instance, or the interest in the occult, but our church isn't satisfying their need.

It doesn't need to be all that radically different....