



## DIOCESE OF EXETER

**Grow in Prayer | Make New Disciples | Serve the People of Devon with Joy**

### NEXT STEPS

The pandemic has changed every aspect of life over the last 18 months and the life of our churches is no exception. We have been challenged in all sorts of ways and I have been moved by the way people have stepped up and stepped out in faith. I give thanks for deeper engagement with local communities, proclaiming the joy of a God who yearns that people everywhere experience life in all its fullness. Most of our parishes and Mission Communities have revealed their resilience, but some are feeling fragile and apprehensive about the future. As a Diocese, it is time to take stock so that we emerge from this extraordinary period with a clear sense of direction and a realistic plan for how to get there. We need to move forward in a way that is both creative and sustainable. Now is the time to renew our trust in the leading of God.

'Next Steps' represents the crystallisation of our collective learning to date. It draws on the Listening in Deaneries consultation, 'For Such A Time As This', carried out in 2020 and the work of the Theological Reflections Group, a group of clergy and laity from across the Diocese who met during lockdown. It incorporates feedback from the Diocesan Synod held in May 2021 on the Church of England's Emerging Vision for the 2020s and what I learnt at first-hand during my online visits to every deanery chapter. With so many rural parishes, we have also drawn upon the wisdom garnered in the excellent 'Lightening the Load' toolkit and have consulted our Growing the Rural Church team. All these tributaries have fed into our thinking.



It is my hope that, as we move forward, we can build a culture that is mutually supportive, working together to make bold decisions, always willing to listen and to adapt. I hope the document will stimulate imaginative and realistic conversations about how our Mission Communities can develop over the next three years. That development will help inform how our stipendiary clergy can best be deployed. Recognising that some significant challenges still lie ahead of us, we need to enable our Mission Communities to flourish in ways that are fruitful and sustainable, with thriving congregations that make a difference. May God bless our endeavours as together we seek to grow in prayer, to make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy.

+ Robert Exon

28<sup>th</sup> June 2021



## OUR VISION

*'I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.'* John 15.5

**As God's pilgrim people, we seek to share in the mission of God as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by:**

### **Growing in prayer**

We want to abide in Christ and live our lives close to God. This means taking risks as we become more honest with ourselves and more honest with God. Prayer opens up deep places within us to God's grace, which is why it is such a life-giving activity. Going deeper in prayer is essential if we are to witness to God's Kingdom and grow into the people God is calling us to be.

### **Making new disciples**

A disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ. With Christ as our companion and guide, we can travel through life differently and invite others to share in the adventure. We want to be more faithful in our discipleship and allow God to shape our priorities and values. The gospel is good news but, if we are to bring more people to Christ, we need to find new ways of telling the story, of explaining our faith and giving a reason for the hope that is in us.

### **Serving the people of Devon with joy**

We want to be ambassadors for Christ, making a difference in the world and witnessing to God's love and justice, especially in the communities where we live and in our schools and workplaces. Working in partnership with others who are transforming lives, we seek to address the global issues confronting our generation so that all may flourish.



## MISSION COMMUNITIES

We seek to fulfil our calling to love God and serve the people of Devon through our network of Mission Communities. These are diverse, vibrant and sustainable groupings of parishes across the Diocese which are **mission-oriented, community-focused and locally-rooted**. At the heart of this network are our parish churches, which for centuries have been places of prayer, pastoral care, evangelism and community service in Devon. Increasingly today, they are complemented by chaplaincies, social action projects and varied and creative new expressions of worship, the result of which is an exciting **mixed ecology**. Together, they speak of God's compassion and love, and ensure a Christian presence in every community across the county.

Communities are how human beings relate to one another. We discover both what we need from others and what we can offer so that all may flourish. As the Church, our Mission Communities help us to be more effective in our discipleship of Jesus Christ. They enable us to be flexible and to work across boundaries, breaking down a sense of isolation. They enable us to be more adept at responding to the variety of contexts and cultures of Devon, whether market towns, coastal communities, remote rural villages or large urban centres of population. They encourage the development of specialist and pioneering ministries, and support our work with schools, children, young people, families and older people in the community.

The pandemic has taught us that we can adapt and change if we want to. As we take stock, we need to be unflinchingly realistic about the challenges confronting us, matched by our trust in the Holy Spirit who leads us.

# Mission Communities Mixed Ecology

## Parish Churches

Parish Churches (Resource & Minister)  
Festival Churches & Chapels of Ease

## Chaplaincies

include working with schools, care homes, colleges & universities, hospitals, prisons & workplaces.  
Chaplaincies may also include work with groups such as children & families or specific areas of expertise such as end of life care & funeral ministry

## Church Schools

Where there are Church Schools in a Mission Community we need to see these as worshipping communities & build strong relationships



## Social Action Projects

include foodbanks, debt counselling, mental health services, support groups, toddler groups, lunch clubs, memory cafés and environmental projects

## Digital Church

includes streamed services, telephone services, social media channels and online communities

## Fresh Expressions

include new ways of being church such as Messy Church, Café Church, Church Plants and other new worshipping communities

mission-oriented, community-focused and locally-rooted



## Forging creative partnerships in the Gospel

Not every parish can offer every aspect of the Church's life and ministry, but by joining in partnership with neighbouring churches and forming a Mission Community we gain the critical mass and diversity of 'gifts of the Spirit' that enable us to work together more effectively and sustainably. Burdens of administration can be shared and governance simplified and improved through pastoral reorganisation and/or by utilising powers to create joint councils. All this involves a commitment to:

regular prayer and worship	opportunities for learning, teaching, nurture and growth for disciples of all ages	ensuring our churches are safe places for all people by working together to prevent abuse and foster a culture of mutual respect
pastoral care and safeguarding	youth and children's work and worship, including engagement with local schools and colleges, and work with older people in the community	connecting with the local community especially in service to the marginalised
evangelism and mission, often in collaboration with ecumenical partners	equipping members for ministry and the development of ministry teams so that no one ministers alone	good administration, effective governance and efficient stewardship of time, resources, money and buildings



## Unity and Diversity

Mission Communities vary from place to place and are likely to include a range of local expressions within them:

	Mission Community	Parish Church	Festival Church	Mission Initiative
Focus	Team, Vision Co-ordination, Administration, Governance, Safeguarding, Ministry	Local mission, identity, regular worship, potential for growth, local ministry	Local mission, identity, welcome, community space, prayer, linked to Mission Community	Local mission, network, non-geographical, fresh expression, reaching people others don't reach
Governance	Joint Council (JC) or single PCC	PCC or Representation on JC	Representation on PCC or JC	PCC or JC or Bishop's Mission Order

The commitment to work together may be formalised as a united benefice or expressed through a looser partnership. One size doesn't fit all but ideally, local governance and ministry arrangements will have a sacramental character as visible signs of the Mission Community's common purpose, expressing and developing its unity across a rich diversity of gifts. In a multi-parish context, the preferred model will be to work towards a single legal benefice with a Team Ministry for the cure of souls, and a single PCC or Joint Council for governance.

## Working together

God calls the Church to be the praying, serving heart of local communities, which is why each Mission Community needs to have a **Mission Community Plan** that is fit for purpose and is subject to regular review. This should be a working document to help the local church grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy. We need consciously to look outwards and engage with the wider community, including local community leaders and decision makers.

Mission Communities will be led by visionary, imaginative clergy working collaboratively in partnership with others across the Mission Community. They will be adept at fostering teamwork so that no one ministers alone. The **Mission Community Team** will benefit from having clear aims and be committed to building a culture that enables change and is mutually accountable. The team may be commissioned locally, and its leader can expect to receive ongoing support and training for their oversight. The Mission Community is likely to benefit from working ecumenically and having a paid or volunteer administrator who can release the mission energy of others.

A Mission Community Team  
may look like this:





## Relating well

‘By their fruits you will know them,’ says Jesus. ‘Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles?’ (Matthew 7.16). Signs of the health of a Christian community will be evident in the quality of its relationships, the genuineness of its welcome, the wellbeing of its clergy and ministers, its ability to work with diversity and handle disagreement well. Busy does not necessarily equate to healthy. A culture of mutual respect will only flourish where discrimination is rooted out, where prejudice and disparities of power are addressed, and where the requirements of accountability and responsibility are properly understood. Attention to safeguarding will ensure that all are safe and pastoral care is never coercive. In these ways we build a new equity in Christ. When writing to the Church in Galatia, Paul lists what he calls ‘the fruit of the Spirit’: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal.5.22). As he rightly says, there is no law against such things: they emerge naturally in the life of a community when we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us.

A Mission Community with a healthy culture will flourish. Here are some of the values and behaviours that we should expect to help us grow into maturity in Christ:

# OUR VALUES

## Generosity of Spirit

We seek God's face in all, believing that everyone is made in the image of God. Preferring others and not thinking too highly of ourselves, we are compassionate, approachable and build trusting relationships.



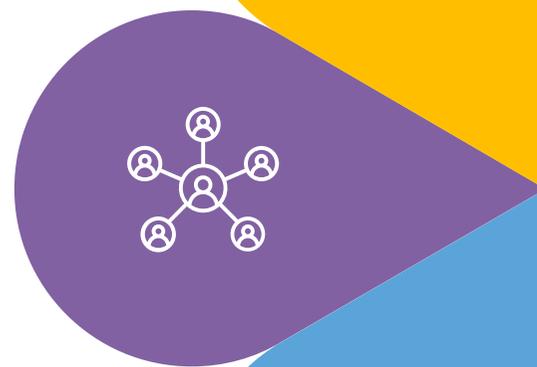
## Wisdom

We want our priorities to reflect scripture and our Christian values. Listening to voices unlike our own, we seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit when making decisions after open and informed discussion.



## Respect

We welcome those who are different from us and show heartfelt respect in the way we speak with one another, treating all people with the dignity they deserve.



## Team Working

We collaborate and work with others to achieve the best outcomes for those we serve and support. We are positive, flexible and constructive, releasing others to use their gifts.



## Openness

We open our hearts and minds without judgement so that we learn from God and one another and allow others to challenge us.



## Honesty

Our principles are rooted in our Christian faith. We seek to be people of integrity: fair, responsible and consistent in all we do. We speak honestly with others and about them.



Love ❖ Joy ❖ Peace ❖ Patience ❖ Kindness ❖ Generosity ❖ Faithfulness ❖ Gentleness ❖ Self-Control  
Our GROWTH Values are rooted in the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.22)



## Finance

Mission Communities need to be funded to meet the actual costs of ministry, principally via the Common Fund which pays for the stipendiary clergy, their pension and housing, clergy and lay training, safeguarding and central support. To be sustainable, a Mission Community also needs to meet the local costs of its mission and to budget for the upkeep of its buildings. The **Common Fund** scheme is designed to share the cost of providing mission and ministry across the Diocese equitably, mindful of Paul's words: 'They gave voluntarily according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry' (2 Corinthians 8:3). The Common Fund request can be made either on a parish basis or on a mission community basis, as locally decided. Mission Communities are supported in their stewardship and financial administration, and are urged to develop efficient ways to collect financial contributions, including contactless and on-line giving, and utilising the **Parish Giving Scheme**. Sacrificial generosity will be a hallmark of a healthy Mission Community.

## Be fruitful for God

'Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15.5). Growth is not a purpose, it is an outcome of our relationship with Jesus Christ. In our Christian life, we are nourished by word and sacrament as we acknowledge our need of God's grace. Paul reminds us to 'hold fast to Christ as head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God' (Colossians 2.19).

It is why spiritual renewal is a priority and why we promote an understanding of discipleship that embraces the whole week, not just one day of it. We are committed to life-long learning because we all need help in making connections between the worlds of education and work, leisure, family life, relationships, and our everyday faith as we live out our baptism. Living branches need to be connected to the vine if they are to be fruitful. Public worship and personal prayer keep us connected with Christ, making personal transformation possible in the power of the Holy Spirit.



‘Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you?’ (2 Cor.13.5). As we reflect on our life together, we need to ask ourselves, are we living the life of faith? Healthy vines are fruitful: they yield a rich harvest. Are we genuinely fruitful or dead on the vine? Where do we need God’s pruning to be more fruitful? Are there things we should stop doing? Where do we need to change? What can we do differently? What can we do better? What are the indicators of ‘sustainability’? What does a healthy Mission Community look like? This is the time for a health check!

# Mission Communities & Health Check

## Sustainability Indicators

### Mission & Ministry

- Making new disciples
- Deepening prayer and spirituality
- Effective Mission Community team
- Vocations nurtured
- Diverse pattern of worship for all ages
- Engagement with local schools and colleges
- Caring for the community and creation
- Engaging children and young people
- Nurturing faith through life events
- Small groups

### Vision & Strategy

- Living Mission Community Plan
- Communication strategy (including digital engagement)
- Engagement and partnership with the wider community on multiple levels

**This tool can help you assess the health of your Mission Community. It is not a blueprint or a judgement on where you are now, but offers a vision of what your Mission Community could be.**



### Resources

- Sufficient people to achieve missional priorities and maintain governance
- Fully functioning PCC/JCC
- Appropriate administrative systems, policies and procedures
- Robust safeguarding procedures and safer church culture
- Sufficient finance for Common Fund and local mission
- Informative reports and accounts
- Compliance with ecclesiastical and charity law
- Stewardship plan and teaching on generosity

### Buildings

- Suitable buildings for MC ministry and mission
- Open, welcoming and clean
- Access for all people
- Protected and secure
- Adequately maintained with up to date quinquennial inspection and maintenance programme
- Working to reduce carbon footprint and improve the environment



## Abiding in Christ

As branches of God's vine, our desire is to be open to God's transforming love and to become a body of missionary disciples: rooted in Jesus Christ, shaped by his death and resurrection, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to share his life with others.

Jesus called his followers 'disciples', but he also called the twelve 'apostles'. A disciple is one who *follows* Jesus and learns from Jesus. An apostle is one who is *sent out*. We are disciples, but we are also sent out by Christ, commissioned to make a difference. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus bids us be 'salt' and 'light' (Matthew 5.13,14). He describes God's kingdom breaking into the world, a process that will not be complete until the end of time when God's rule is fully established on earth. As citizens of God's kingdom, we endeavour to live according to God's principles of love, justice and peace, and commit ourselves to making his kingdom a reality in the places where we live and work.

The closing pages of scripture present a picture of creation redeemed and God's kingdom fully revealed (Revelation 21.1-5). God is in the business of making all things new and this forms the heartbeat of our prayer for the renewal of the Church in Devon. May that renewal begin with us and may we bear fruit for the kingdom.

+ Robert Exon

27<sup>th</sup> June 2021