

LIVING FAITH for the future

A vision for the next five years

Background

This vision emerges from a six month conversation in the diocese around a discussion paper I offered in April 2008. A large number of responses came in from parishes, teams, boards, committees and individuals, and I am very grateful indeed for all the thought behind them and the helpful ideas within them. This paper cannot reflect the full range of responses but I hope it captures the centre of gravity of their collective wisdom. I have proposed a new 'branding' by calling it Living Faith rather than Sharing Life +. This would allow a number of sub-headings eg 'Living Faith for the future', 'Living Faith through our buildings', 'Living Faith with young people' etc. I hope we might have established sufficiently that this is not an attempt to start all over again. A number of people have said that a new title would be refreshing.

I believe firmly that the future health of any diocese lies in the vitality and imagination of the local parish or arena of ministry. Top-down strategies are sometimes helpful (Developing Servant Leadership, Academies) but are often self-defeating because energy resides at local level, and there is plenty of evidence in our diocese of prayerful planning of local mission. What senior leadership can offer, however, is a dynamic framework, not to control but to guide, release and encourage. Bishops can offer direction and undergirding values, and they can try to align resources to those strategic directions. It is in that spirit that I offer this vision.

You'll note that this is a simplified paper in that it doesn't go on to work out the implications of the vision for deaneries, finance, clergy numbers or diocesan structures. It seems best first of all to present a coherent set of directions and then at greater leisure to work away at the alignment of resources.

The hope is that parishes, deaneries and central structures could use the paper as a touchstone to remind us of the values we try to live by and the major directions we need to take if we are to be faithful to Jesus Christ in this our day. It shouldn't cut across local planning but rather act as a supportive framework for it. It's rather like a palette of colours which each parish, deanery and Board can use in their own way to create that work of distinctive beauty which is their particular response to God's mission. What we end up with then is a gallery full not of look-alike paintings, but of vibrant, colourful and unique works of art.

Vision

The transformation of all human life under God.

Values

- Contemplative: attentive to God

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord . . . (Colossians 2.6)

Devote yourselves to prayer . . . (Colossians 4.2)

- Creative: imaginatively releasing and harnessing all the gifts of all God's people

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us . . . (Romans 12.6)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . (Colossians 3.16)

- Continuous: rooted in scripture, faithful to the traditions we have received and seeking to give them fresh expression

Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught . . .(Colossians 2.7)
For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you . . . (1 Corinthians 11.23)

- Accountable: to God and to each other as we build for tomorrow as well as today

Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock . . . (Acts 20.28)
Render to God the things that are God's . . . (Luke 20.25)

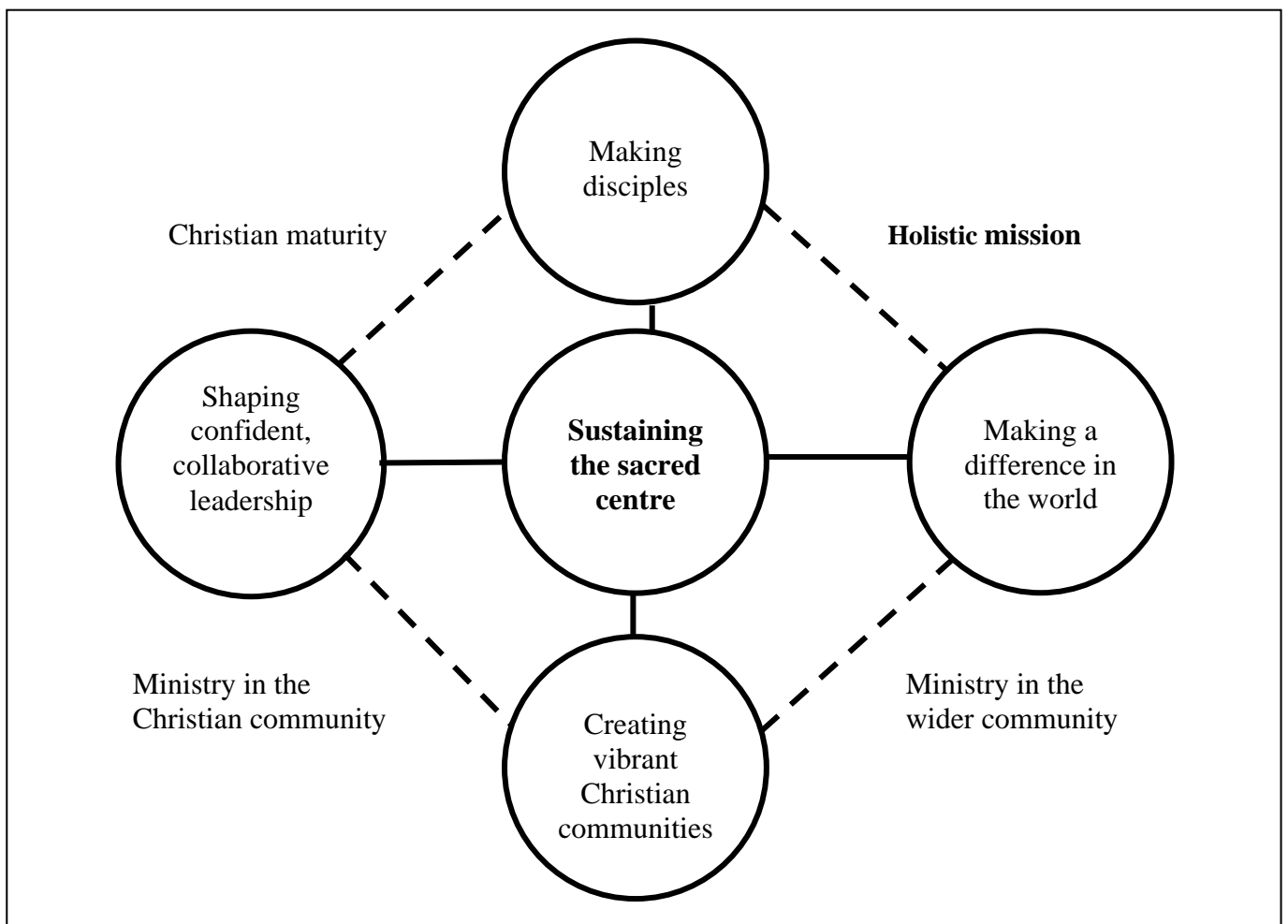
Purpose

To join with God in creating a caring, sustainable and growing Christian presence in every part of the diocese of Oxford, enabling every Christian and every Christian community to live and share the love of God, seen in the life of Jesus Christ.

Priorities

The headline directions are: **Sustaining the sacred centre**
Holistic mission (personal and social)

Spelt out it looks like this:



Put another way, the five priorities are:

1. Sustaining the sacred centre

This is about encouraging and enabling clergy and lay people to deepen their enjoyment of God, and to recognize God's presence in everyday life.

2. Making disciples

This is about the core task left to us by Jesus. It usually takes the form of accompanying people on a journey to faith by the intentional use of nurture courses, mentoring, the catechumenate, or simple friendship.

3. Making a difference in the world

This is about recognising that in a holistic understanding of God's action in the world, there is no mission without social justice; that social justice and prophetic witness cannot be put in a box as a specialism or an extra, but is at the heart of the calling of every Christian community in its own context.

4. Creating vibrant Christian communities

This is about shaping 'communities of grace' which exhibit the character of Jesus. Such attractive communities are genuinely hospitable, deeply engaged with their communities, and passionate about God.

5. Shaping confident, collaborative leadership

This is about developing leadership using all the resources available to the local church. It would involve consolidation in some parishes and new work in others to build up shared ministry in teams, with appropriate training and support.

Over the coming months we will be producing a range of resources including leaflets, a study guide, and a DVD to help bring the Living Faith vision to life. The materials will include illustrations of how the Living Faith vision might work in practice - at parish, deanery and diocesan levels - to help stimulate discussion and thinking. In all cases the intention is to liberate the local Christian community and to work with ecumenical partners wherever possible. It needs also to be remembered that there are a large number of ministries and chaplaincies (schools, health service, prisons, forces) which are not parish-based.

Conclusion

The vision is in essence quite simple – and yet as difficult as bringing in the Kingdom! It gets us on the front foot with the key priorities of holistic mission and sustaining spirituality. For now I hope that we can own the broad vision and get on with using the palette of primary colours to create something beautiful for God.

+John Oxon
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