

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

LIVING FAITH – NEXT PHASE

Proposed direction coming out of a meeting of Bishop’s Council on 18 July 2014

Introduction

The Living Faith vision of the Diocese of Oxford was introduced in 2009 for an initial phase of five years. As the end of this first phase comes closer, extensive consultation has been taking place around the Diocese in order to determine what should happen with Living Faith next. The consultation that has occurred so far has included:

- An evaluation of Living Faith undertaken in summer 2013
- Consultation among clergy attending the diocesan clergy conference in March 2014
- Consultation among LLMs attending the diocesan LLM conference in June 2014
- Discussions by the Bishop’s Staff team and Heads of Diocesan Departments.

Further information on views about the future of Living Faith was also gathered from members of the whole diocesan family attending the “Grand Day Out” that took place in September 2014.

At its 2014 July away day, Bishop’s Council engaged with the information that had been gathered so far in order to begin the work of deciding what should happen with Living Faith after 2014. A proposal coming out of these discussions is given below.

Major considerations

A clear outcome of the consultation that has occurred is that people in the Diocese want to retain Living Faith. There is little desire for any “new” initiative. Rather people want to embed further what already exists. A second major consideration for the future of Living Faith is that the Diocese will have a new bishop in 2015 or 2016. Bishop’s Council therefore considered it appropriate that any plans for the future of Living Faith should be for the period 2015-2017 – enough to see a new bishop in without committing her/him in the longer term. Taking these considerations into account and the direction of discussions that occurred at the July away day, the following proposal has been drafted.

Proposal

During the next two/three years the aim of the Diocese of Oxford should be to embed Living Faith more deeply into its systems, structures and practices. It is proposed that this should occur in a number of ways:

- Through **action** to “mainstream” Living Faith within diocesan systems such as ministerial development, parish profiles, churchwarden training, the structuring of Diocesan Synod agendas etc and also through strategic work of the Diocese such as that about to take place towards the development of vocations and rural strategies. This would entail making Living Faith the guiding principle of all such work, requiring that it reflects the vision’s purpose, framework and structure.
- Through **invitation** to parishes and deaneries to continue and deepen their engagement with Living Faith, or if they’ve not yet made use of it, to consider doing so. Parishes and deaneries will particularly be invited to share stories of their use of Living Faith so that good practice can be extended and good news communicated. The helpfulness of having common labels for existing work and activity will be emphasised, as will the understanding that Living Faith is a tool that can be used, not a model that must be adopted.
- Through **commitment** to model Living Faith within the life and work of the diocesan leadership (Bishop’s Staff and Council). For example, a specific proposal made is that in order to put sustaining the sacred centre at the heart of its work, all meetings of Bishop’s Council should begin by “indwelling the Word” through the use of *lectio divina*. It is hoped that if the diocesan leadership models its commitment to the values of Living Faith, other bodies, at every level of the Diocese, can be encouraged to do the same.
- Through **communication** of Living Faith afresh around the Diocese. This can occur through existing channels (e.g. through the weekly e-news and through the use of the logo on e-mail footers and other communications). An additional aspect of communication will be the continuing offer of Living Faith resources to the Diocese through a fresh offer to churches of existing materials and the development of new materials. An important aspect of future communication will be to make clearer links between the five parts of the Living Faith Framework (Sustaining the Sacred Centre, Making Disciples etc) and its core 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.’*

A further suggestion was that it might be helpful to put in place a **task force** comprised of a number of Bishop’s Council members, to guide, oversee and encourage the implementation of the work proposed, making sure that it does not merely become lost in ‘business as usual’.