

Signs of a more Christ-like Church

1 About this Document

We are called to become a more Christ-like church for the sake of God's world: contemplative, compassionate and courageous. This document is written to help anyone asking the questions 'how can we become a more Christ-like Church?' and 'where is God already at work in my community?'

You might be thinking about the future vision for your parish, benefice, school, chaplaincy or deanery. You might also be applying for a Development Fund grant.

This document provides examples (signs) of what a 'more Christ-like church for the sake of God's world' might look like. It can help us recognise:

- ways in which our churches are already Christ-like,
- those things which energise us (and some which don't),
- what gifts God has already given us,
- how can we become a more Christ-like church in the future?

Common Vision Focus Areas

As we discerned the vision for our Diocese, we identified seven areas of particular need: these are deemed to be Focus Areas for the Diocese at this time. As individual communities discern their vision, many of them will embark on initiatives (or may already be engaged in activities) which overlap these Focus Areas. The signs you identify from Section 2 might be happening in the Focus Areas listed in Section 3.

2 Signs of a more Christ-like church

The signs are many and varied: the examples given are not exhaustive neither are they prescriptive, but we hope you will find them helpful in discerning their gifts and where God is calling you.

These signs may be observed through changes in behaviour: changes in what people do or what they say (either as individuals or as a group/community). Signs may also include measurable evidence such as changes in numbers of people, number of events, frequency of events, time spent, money committed, energy consumption, etc.

The signs are listed below in three groups:

1. **Signs that we are becoming more Christ-like:** more contemplative, compassionate and courageous.
2. **Signs of healthy journeying:** because travelling well (in a Christ-like way) is as important as arriving at the right destination.
3. **Signs of deep change:** 'key indications of deep change' as a result of Common Vision.

2.1 Signs that we are becoming more Christ-like for the sake of God's world

The following are adapted from Bishop Steven's *Beatitudes* study guide, available to order online at store.oxford.anglican.org

Contemplative

- More people engaging more in contemplative activity (time spent with God):
 - prayer, meditation, reflective activity, quiet days
 - a greater rootedness in worship, word and sacrament
 - establishing healthy rhythms of prayer, rest, work: becoming more fully human
 - discerning God's call to us as individuals *and* as communities
 - to be good news in an over-active and busy world.
- Signs of a greater sense of humility:
 - seeking wisdom or meaning
 - offering to others the gift of silence, still places and moments of encounter with the living God
 - surrender our doing in order to make space for stillness, that God might be free to do and act within us
- Listening more and saying less:
 - listening deeply to ourselves, the world in which we live and to one another
 - development of the 'inner life'
 - wrestling with questions rather than settling for superficial answers
 - finding joy in the midst of suffering

Compassionate

- More time spent with more people:
 - offering hospitality, befriending or support
 - identifying with the least and the lost
 - being tender and gentle with one another
 - bearing one another's burdens
 - nurturing children in our school communities
- Signs of a greater sense of forgiveness, grace and nurture:
 - listening to the communities around us and in the wider world
 - living out our faith in acts of kindness and generosity
 - seeking together a radical new Christian inclusivity in the church
- Gracious welcome and hospitality; taking action for peace and justice:
 - taking steps to care for the earth
 - acting together to serve the poor, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger
 - mourning for the suffering in the world, and take that suffering seriously
 - providing places of hospitality and welcome for all in our church buildings

Courageous

- More people taking courageous steps of faith, commitment and endurance:
 - deepening our vision of what it means to be human; of a just and peaceful world; daring to practise hope
 - consciously seeking to live our lives to the glory of God

- teaching our faith clearly and confidently to children, young people and adults
- investing our God-given resources boldly, for the sake of the Kingdom, and not hoard them in fear
- Making a difference in our local communities through:
 - bearing the cost of discipleship throughout the course of our lives
 - being bold and consistent in our evangelism and witness to our Christian faith
- Signs of reconciliation: resolving conflict and working together for peace:
 - seeking justice and working for peace
 - working for a resolution of conflict
 - seeking reconciliation in our church and in the world
 - working in creative partnerships with other churches, faith communities and organisations

2.2 Signs of healthy journeying

The signs listed so far tend to describe outcomes – observable changes in what people do or say. We also recognise that we may see signs of a more Christ-like church *in the way we journey towards* those outcomes. Healthy journeying is important: for example, a congregation that develops a compassionate ministry offering hospitality to homeless people is commendable, but if that journey leaves the congregation exhausted, divided and anxious, any benefit is seriously undermined.

So, when discerning your vision, consider what signs of a more Christ-like church emerging in the way you journey towards that vision: some examples and suggestions are given below.

Signs of healthy journeying from the outset

- **We seek to notice where God is at work**, being attentive to where God’s energy is present in ourselves and the people we are with. We respond by joining in with God, even adjusting from our intended course to do so.
- **We seek to get to the heart of the matter**, addressing the root of the issue rather than treat the symptoms. We prefer to wrestle with the questions than settle for superficial answers. Where we decide a ‘quick fix’ is tactically the best thing to do, we recognise that fact.

Signs of healthy journeying: making the task manageable

- **We aim for realistic expectations** of the (total) cost and resource needed to achieve the expected outcomes, and we plan accordingly.
- **We take a phased approach**. Initiatives lasting more than 6 months are divided into shorter phases, with funding assigned to each phase. This also allows a re-assessment of direction and pace between phases.
- **We make use of pilots**. For experimental or large-scale initiatives, we start small, using pilots to test the approach first.

Signs of healthy journeying on the way towards our vision

- **We pray as we go**, recognising that we cannot do this in our own strength but only with God’s help.
- **We learn as we go**, recognising that we develop and grow in faith as we undertake this work. We learn by **experimenting** and we embrace failure. We acknowledge that we do not know all

the answers: we may need courage to ‘walk in the dark’, since our greatest challenges draw us into uncharted territory where there are no ready-made solutions and no experts – if anything, we *become* the experts.

- **We build relationships and empower others as we go.** We share responsibility, allow others to shape and lead initiatives, we build confidence by supporting them to do so. We continually build relationships, particularly with those outside the church, leading to an understanding of people and issues previously unknown. Internally, we work towards equally valued and complementary roles of lay and ordained people.
- **We inspire others.** We think, speak and act positively: inspiring others to dream dreams.
- **We expect to share what we learn with others.** We are part of a diocesan-wide learning community that shares what we learn and is willing to gift the fruits of our labours for the benefit of others.
- **Ongoing monitoring:** we monitor our initiatives as they progress (using ‘lead’ as well as ‘lag’ measures¹) to understand how we are progressing in relation to our plan. We make regular monitoring measures and share them openly.
- **We plan for sustainable initiatives.** We recognise the risk associated with fixed term resources (such as funding support, short-term leasehold agreements or fixed term employment contracts) and plan accordingly to mitigate against these risks. We manage the transition of fixed term resources so that the work can continue without unhelpful or harmful side-effects (such as when funding support ends). We plan for a **legacy of benefits** from our work, that continues beyond the lifetime of fixed term resources.

Signs of healthy journeying: reflection

- **We reflect on our work:** from this **we can describe the impact** it has had on our community, we **notice where God has been at work**, and recognise how we ourselves have changed and **what we have learned**. We report that back to the Diocese, recognising that we participate in a shared process of discernment and learning together.

¹ ‘Lead’ measures are generally predictive of the desired outcomes or those which may trigger success and are particularly important in the early phases of an initiative. ‘Lag’ measures emerge when the outcomes have already been realised.

3 Signs of significant progress in our focus areas

The seven areas of focus are listed below, together with examples of the kind of activity that is covered in those areas. You'll find [further information about each focus area on the website](#) too.

3.1 Making a bigger difference in the world and serving the poor

- Embedding 'Creation Care' in our discipleship and mission. Initiatives to reduce our carbon footprint, increase recycling, reduce waste, etc.. Participation in the Diocesan scheme of energy audits to reduce the environmental impact of our buildings.
- Community engagement and community organising for social change. In particular, participation in (or use of) the strategic partnership between the Diocese and Citizens UK.
- Deploying financial assets for social investment.

The Spring edition of *Pathways* magazine includes [further information about this focus area](#).

3.2 Sharing our faith and growing the local church

- Activities to intentionally contact, dialogue with and share our faith with those who are not Christians, on the fringes of our church or having no contact with the Church.
- Any involvement in catechesis: the annual cycle of teaching and discipleship (starting in the each autumn) leading to baptism and confirmation (in Easter-tide)

Bishop Steven's blog contains lots of [information about Catechesis](#)

3.3 Growing new congregations

Developing a wide range of new congregations of different types and sizes:

- New congregations in existing churches or new 'fresh expressions' of church²: these are typically smaller in size: up to 100 people
- New churches/congregations (these are medium-sized, with 100+ adult members)
- New 'resourcing hubs': churches who deliberately over-resource themselves in order to generously give of their resources to support and grow other churches. (often existing large churches with 250+ adult members)

The Summer edition of *Pathways* magazine includes [further information about this focus area](#).

² For a definition of Fresh Expression, see <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>

3.4 Serving every school in our community

- Developing chaplaincy in schools, especially the development of new models of (contextually-specific) chaplaincy to address the needs of the children in those schools.
- Reimagining church-school relationships. Any work to develop meaningful relationships between our parish church congregations and any or all of our schools, particularly work which encourages a broader involvement of laypeople in a church-school partnership.

The Autumn edition of *Pathways* magazine will include further information about this focus area

3.5 Setting the discipleship of all at the heart of our common life

This focus area covers any work that helps the whole people of God to feel confident and equipped to live out the Good News of Jesus in all of their life, especially their life outside of the church.

Specifically, this includes:

- Any work which helps individual church members to take their discipleship seriously such that they are motivated to invest time in it. In particular, involvement in the Diocesan approach to Personal Discipleship Planning (PDP) with a mentor or spiritual companion.
- Work which builds up groups of Christians as serious disciples of Christ, developing their understanding of what it means to live out their faith in the world as confident, theologically-literate Christians. In particular, involvement in the experimental 'Firepit' or 'Bonfire Party' meetings.
- Work which engages in the Church of England's *Everyday Faith* approach, which seeks to make small but significant changes in the life of our churches: how we act, talk and think, to equip our congregations to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life.

Find [Personal Discipleship Plans and resources](#) in the everyday faith section of *Pathways*.

3.6 Celebrate and bless Milton Keynes

This focus area relates to any work that grows the depth, impact and numerical size of churches in Milton Keynes. Particular features of growth are:

- Building effective teams: strengthening church leadership to meet the challenge of further growth.
- Pioneering new worshipping communities, meeting the needs of un-churched and de-churched people.
- Enabling 'breakthrough churches' to grow beyond the limits of their existing model

3.7 Children and young people

Work which explores new ways of engaging with children, families and young people. Areas of interest include:

- Work which breaks through the cultural and theological assumptions that the church typically works from, in its approach to children and young people.
- Exploring the gaps between the culture of emerging generations and that of the church.
- Ways to engage children and young people as co-disciples, co-travellers and co-teachers in uncovering the way of Jesus together.
- New understandings of and approaches to intergenerational work.

The Autumn edition of *Pathways* magazine will include further information about this focus area