

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”
(WORDS OF JESUS FROM JOHN 10:10)

THE DIOCESE OF GLOUCESTER VISION 2022

Life
TOGETHER

A message from Bishop Rachel

As we begin these next few years of LIFE Together, I hope and pray for an even more kingdom-shaped panorama across the Diocese of Gloucester.

I pray that in the coming years there will be a rich variety of sustainable and diverse worshipping communities, long-established and new, celebrated as living and breathing beacons of love, hope and justice. Our worshipping communities will be enabling the Body of Christ to grow, be strengthened and to participate in God's work amid joy and pain, such that new and existing baptised followers of Jesus Christ of all ages, backgrounds, colour and accent, are increasingly confident in living and sharing their stories of faith in their everyday contexts, rooted in prayer.

Stories of faith will be growing through strong links between pre-school groups, schools, homes and local worshipping communities, and we will be at the forefront of caring for creation.

Across the diocese we will be partnering with organisations, and making connections with people committed to the care and transformation of lives, communities and the environment, grounded in our desire for God's kingdom to come on earth as in heaven.

As we serve and engage with the struggles and delights of the people and places of this diocese, people of all ages and backgrounds will be inspired to discover Jesus Christ and life in all its fullness, and become disciples.



Commitments 2022

We remain committed to our 2017 LIFE vision, yet the spotlight of the Holy Spirit is now shining more strongly on these five specific LIFE commitments:

- **Being advocates for flourishing through initiatives which combat injustice, environmental destruction, exclusion and isolation**
- **Encouraging new and courageous ways of worshipping in different places which connect with more people**
- **Nurturing everyday disciples**
- **Investing in people and programmes which excite young people to explore and grow in faith**
- **Developing diverse lay and ordained leaders**

These have emerged from listening to stories from across the diocese and noticing what is being lived, not least as we have continued to emerge from the months of a viral pandemic and the process of shaping and implementing Deanery Strategic Plans. Attention has also been paid to applications to the LIFE Development Fund (LDF) over the past five years.

It is clear that in the years ahead, we need to focus on developing sustainable eucharistic worshipping communities, existing and new, which embody the Five Marks of Mission*, reflect diversity, and nurture disciples of all ages to live out their faith seven days a week among the people and places of their lives.

In our desire to baptise new followers of Christ we need to be particularly focusing on the young, and people from places and demographics where connection has been weak or lacking. It is also clear that our church schools need to run as a thread through all of this as we 'place schools at the heart of our mission'.

A focus on developing stronger partnership with groups and organisations is about justice and transformation for the common good as we live our Christian commitment to the flourishing of people and places, including a much sharper focus on the need to care for creation.

The LIFE commitments from 2017 which are not specifically named in LIFE Together, remain implicit to the 'how' of realising our vision and our commitment to share the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ so that people may know life in all its fullness.



Looking back with Thanksgiving

In 2017 I wrote my dream picture of the landscape in 2022, which began with:

Through Jesus Christ, 'God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things' (Colossians 1:20) and one day 'creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Romans 8:21). One day all will be brought to completion and God's kingdom will be fully here. Yet all this is not simply about a future hope. As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to join in now with God's kingdom mission of liberation and transformation - to work for the flourishing of all people and the flourishing of the whole of creation.

As we begin these next few years of LIFE Together I want to say a heartfelt Thank You for all the seeds which have been planted, the shoots which have been watered and the fruit we have seen in the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds, and across diverse communities and contexts. I am also thankful for the vulnerability and openness in naming failure and struggle. Furthermore, five years ago we had no idea that we would be living a time of worldwide viral pandemic, resulting in loss of so many different sorts.

Thank you for the many ways people continue to live both lament and hope. It means that we begin these next few years in a very different place and with new perspectives, hopes and fears.

As I look back at our three commitments to **Leadership, committed to transformation**, I note the encouraging signs of this being reflected in local ministry and the way parishes, benefices and deaneries are shaping themselves going forward. There have also been wider initiatives with significant local impact such as our Ministerial Experience Scheme, the piloting of the benefice Flourish programme, the Funeral Project, and much more, which has led to noticeable and kingdom-shaped change.

Regarding our aspiration **to open new paths to faith with Imagination**, a number of places have strengthened links between local church communities and our church schools, as well as a real desire for growth in toddler groups and engagement with parents and carers, not least through some greater connections with baptism families. The national Growing Faith vision has highlighted the importance of ensuring that the strengthening of links includes homes and families, and there are some inspiring examples we can learn from.

I am also delighted that there has been a greater focus on ministry among young people, including diocesan investment in developing people to act as Youth Connectors across the diocese.

Some of what has grown from proactive church-school partnerships and effective ministry with young people, at home, in school, college and university has led to **new and courageous ways of worshipping in different places which connect with more people**. It has been good to see the emergence of several different expressions of Church within parishes across the diocese, including Messy Church and Forest Church. There has also been a strengthening of presence in different contexts through existing chaplaincy ministry as well as the exploration of new forms such as Anna Chaplaincy with older people.

As we continue to grow in what it means for us to be the Church, gathered and sent, I have been heartened to see an increased emphasis on nurturing, supporting and equipping people to live out their **Faith** among the people and places of daily life. This is integral to what it means for us to be Church and disciples of all ages and backgrounds.

The development of Seeking Shapes for Living (and now Personal Shapes for Living) is just one example of what is helping people of all ages to reflect

and grow in everyday faith. I rejoice that there are people of all ages who have encountered Jesus Christ for the first time or in deeper ways since 2017.

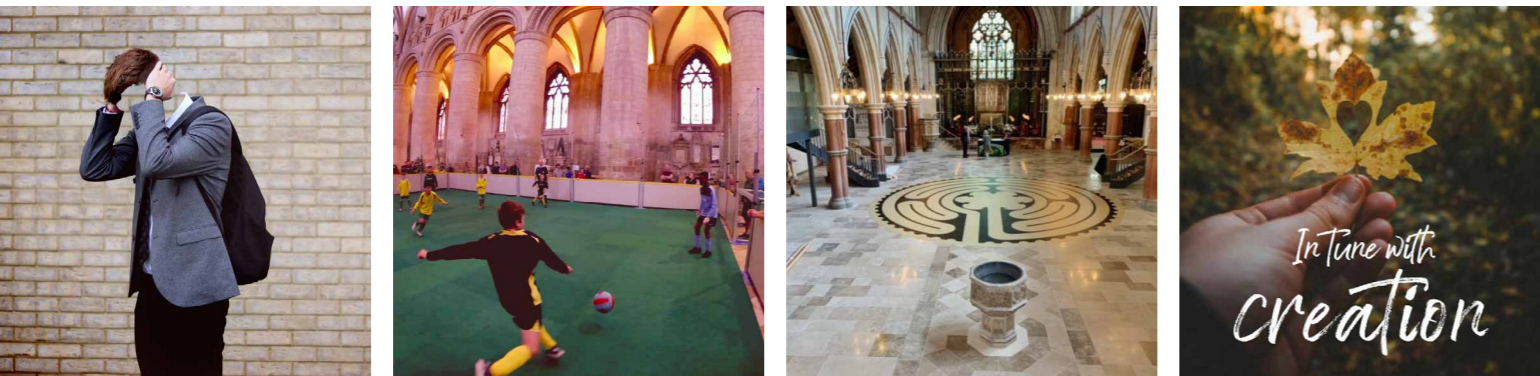
Across all our LIFE commitments, nothing has sat in isolation and it has been encouraging to see people making connections between the commitments in their local contexts, keeping **Faith** at the heart.

There has been growth in outward facing **Engagement** with the wider community and partner organisations, and it has been uplifting to see a healthy focus on 'with' rather than 'to' in times of both celebration and struggle. I am aware that a number of initiatives which grew as a response to people's needs, hopes and losses during a time of viral pandemic have changed the landscape.

It is exciting to now have the Grace Network (GN) on board with their focus on social enterprise embracing justice. Some of the many community initiatives around food provision have included strong partnership with GN's The Long Table.

Alongside a deep commitment to healthy parish ministry, our various **Engagement** commitments have been strongly woven with our **Imagination, Faith** and **Leadership** commitments, regarding the emergence of Sportily and the establishment of the Church





Army Centres for Mission, with a focus on lay pioneer ministry. The seeds of intention that these initiatives will lead to new worshipping communities which connect with people in new ways, have been sown, as have other seeds of church planting. Some of this relates to new housing developments, and the ways people are approaching these in some parishes is weaving together so many of our LIFE commitments including advocacy for flourishing and seeking to establish new worshipping communities in different places. In addition, this diocese is now taking a key lead nationally regarding good stewardship of land and provision of social housing.

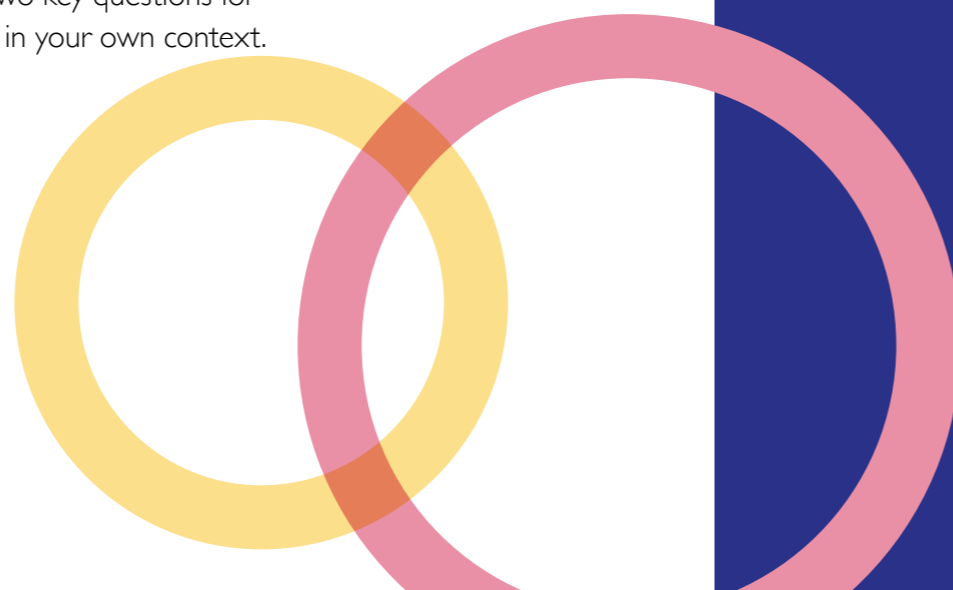
A number of worshipping communities are to be commended for some **bold, creative** and courageous redevelopment of buildings, as well as using buildings in new ways to enable stronger engagement with the wider community. Whilst some aspects of work among staff at College Green regarding the **use, upkeep and future of our church buildings** have taken longer for a number of reasons, specific work is now underway to look at developing innovative approaches to support the

upkeep of our church buildings.

Throughout everything I celebrate the increased focus on being advocates for the flourishing of all creation. As a diocese we are now participating in the A Rocha Eco Church Award scheme and there has been much going on locally, such that a number of worshipping communities and schools are working together on the award scheme, and as a diocese we have received our bronze award.

In all of this, and particularly during the viral pandemic, we have learnt much about how to **share our stories in new and different ways, including through digital media.**

There is so much more I could paint into the big picture regarding the last five years and where we have seen transformation as well as the places where change still needs to be seen. However, the complete colour and texture of the picture only comes into being when local hue is added, so I now offer two key questions for you to consider in your own context. »



Questions

- Within the context of the LIFE vision where is the joy and where is the disappointment? Do any clear themes emerge?
- Can you find ways to listen to those in the wider community of your context and ask what changes people have noticed regarding your impact? Where are the resonances with the LIFE vision?

The Five Marks of Mission:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Our strategic focus resonates with **The Church of England** vision for a **Church that is Jesus Christ centred** and **shaped**, and the **strategic priorities**:

- **To be a church that is younger and more diverse**
- **To be a church where mixed ecology is the norm** – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new churches and new forms of Church to our parishes, schools and chaplaincies
- **To become a church of missionary disciples** where all God's people are released to live the Christian life.

A Church which must adapt and put its trust in God to become **simpler, humbler, and bolder.**





Life