## TOGETHER IN CHRIST, SHARING HOPE

**REFLECTING ON THE THEMES OF THE DIOCESAN VISION IN PARISHES**

October 2023

### Introduction

In June 2023, the Diocese of Chester published a report, ‘Casting the Net Wide’ which explained the discernment process for developing a shared vision.

These exercises and questions are to be used in conjunction with that report. They may provide a framework for conversations in churches, chaplains, youth groups, schools, and individual disciples to explore our vision together. They have been provided to help you to understand how the evolving language applies to your own ministry and works out in your own local context.

These exercises could help you understand, recall, and remember the themes which underpin our shared vision. You might then begin to apply them in your day-to-day walk with God, in your own place.

There are lots of questions to think and pray about. You may want to look at these over several sessions, in small groups, giving yourself time to listen to God, individually and together.

By keeping our focus on blessing the 1.5 million, one life at a time, we will begin to prioritise and discern what to take forward and what we need to put down.

* **What do we do first?**
* **What can wait?**
* **What should we lose?**
* **What can we pick up later?**

Our shared vision will help us to make decisions, face challenges, identify opportunities, make connections, think creatively, choose wisely, and discern correctly.

Our shared vision will help us to do great things with God, together!

**Preparation for discussions**

Depending on the size of your group/groups, you will need:

Pens, large sheets of (flip chart) paper, sticky notes

Opening worship, key biblical passages/have Bible available

Opening presentation and how the discussions will work

Copies of relevant pages and prayers for each session:

SESSION 1: Pages 5 & 6

SESSION 2: PAGES 7-13 & PRAYERS 15

SESSION 3: PAGES 7-13 & PRAYERS 16

SESSION 4: PAGES 7-13 & PRAYERS 17

SESSION 5: PAGES 7-13 & PRAYERS 18

SESSION 6: PAGES 18 & 19

SESSION 7: PAGES 20 & 21

Copies of the **Casting the Net Wide** report which provides more detailed commentary and comments that were gathered in shaping the themes.

You may wish to watch the video of Bishop Mark talking about the emerging vision themes on the Diocesan website.

A member of the Outreach team at Church House may be able to help facilitate your discussions. Please get in touch if that would be useful.

**SESSION 1, INTRODUCING OUR FUTURE STORY**

**TOGETHER IN CHRIST, SHARING HOPE**

***Together in Christ, sharing hope*** is our diocesan vision, the title of our future story.

It is the overarching theme that unites us. From thousands of responses gathered prayerfully in conversations that took place across the diocese, we have distilled this vision statement. A shared narrative which we can use together to explain our journey forward.

***Together in Christ, sharing hope*** summarises both an aspiration of who we are, what we are doing and what we aim to be as we look to the future, fulfilling our commission to be disciples and make disciples of Christ.

Underneath the title of our story there are four themes, like chapters of a book, which overlap and underpin our vision statement.

These are:

**Growing braver, fuller faith**

**Blessing 1.5 million lives, one life at a time**

**Transformative loving service (in practice)**

**Engaged locally, working together in loving generosity**

As we continue to develop our future story and themes, we need to continue to listen together and to God as we work out how we can all inhabit this story.

* **What part do we play in bringing the story and these themes to life in our everyday lives?**
* **How could we grow together as disciples to be confident in sharing our own stories to introduce people to Jesus?**

**SESSION 1, QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS**

**TOGETHER IN CHRIST, SHARING HOPE**

* Which part of this vision title, ‘***Together in Christ, sharing hope’*** excites us?
* What challenges us about this vision title?
* How does this vision title reflect our own story, what we are already doing ‘together’ in our ministry in the life and work of our church or school?
* What does it mean to be "together" in the context of church, parish, deanery and diocese.
* Bishop Mark has talked about a ‘hope deficit’. What does that phrase mean to you?
* What does hope look like where you are now?
* What does it look like when we inhabit this future story?

What happens? What do we see? As we look ahead, in our vision, what will have changed in how we do things, not just what we do?

What is different? What has been achieved? What challenges have been overcome?

* What will others notice?
* Are there verses in scripture which speak into this vision for you?

**SESSION 1, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**TOGETHER IN CHRIST, SHARING HOPE**

**Pause**

In the light of your discussions, pause to spend time celebrating your church and thinking about the challenges and opportunities of your local ministry, here and now. Bring before God the dreams for your church’s future story and the changes you want to see.

**Reflect**

What do you want to thank God for on your journey?

Thank God for the opportunities, activities, people, and partnerships where we have worked together. Thank God for relationships and situations, which have brought hope, and continue to bring hope to our communities.

**Ask**

Ask God to highlight those areas where transformation is necessary in ourselves and in our churches. Ask God to show you where there are opportunities for working together in Christ to bring hope and transformation to the lives of others.

**Yielding prayer**

Father, we yield ourselves to you. Take us, break us, shape us, and remake us. Bring us together in Christ for the glory of your Kingdom here in on earth. Direct our discipleship, transform our hearts, and transform your Church to transform lives, bringing hope to the communities in which we are called to serve.

Help us to listen. Equip and enlighten us to ensure that each person in *(this place)* – our present population, those moving in and future generations who will be born, live and work here in the future - has an opportunity to get to know a Christian and discover something of who Jesus is.

In the name of Christ, Amen

**SESSIONS 2, 3, 4 & 5**

**RESONATE, REFRESH, RESOURCE, REVIEW**

 **SUB THEMES**

**INTRODUCTION**

Now let’s consider our four sub-themes. These sub-themes are like chapters of the story, interlinked and overlapping. We want to listen and understand the language and to share what we believe God is saying in the phrases that have been discerned. This is an opportunity to unpack and explore how each of these themes is already resonating in our own journeys and ministries, in our own parishes and local contexts.

Write a sub-theme at the top of a large piece of paper and underneath create **four** columns to record your ideas and conversations in the columns using the questions provided as prompts, for the first three columns: **RESONATE, REFRESH, RESOURCE**.

Then **REVIEW** one column at a time, working from left to right.

## SUB THEMES

### Growing braver, fuller faith

***Together in Christ sharing hope*** is about getting out of the boat and taking steps of faith that feel strange and scary. We trust God as we develop new ways and in unfamiliar places to make new disciples to live, love and grow in Christ.

### Blessing 1.5 million lives, one life at a time

***Together in Christ sharing hope*** is about pointing people to Christ in everything we say and do. We are prioritising introducing people to Jesus, sharing hope and inviting others to engage with the Gospel message.

### Transformative loving service (in practice)

***Together in Christ sharing hope*** is about sharing the love of Christ in diverse ways through the ‘five marks of mission’: Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, Treasure.

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

To respond to human need by loving service.

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

### Engaged locally, working together in loving generosity.

***Together in Christ, sharing hope***means responding and relating in creative expressions of loving service, faith, prayer, and worship at local level: working in partnership and in harmony, according to the diverse places and local communities we serve.

**COLUMN 1. RESONATE**

**Thinking about each sub theme, ask yourselves:**

* What do we hear?
* How does this resonate?
* What does this language mean to us?
* What challenges us?
* What are we already doing?
* How far along this story have we already travelled?
* What dreams do we have that would give hope to us and to our community?



 **COLUMN 2: REFRESH**

**Looking at the ideas you have generated in column 1 ask yourselves these questions:**

* What do we need to refresh?
* What can we build on?
* What can we grow?
* Where do we want to get to?
* What can we do now/next?
* What is distracting or hindering us?
* What might we lay down or stop doing?
* What else could we do?

**COLUMN 3: RESOURCE**

**Looking at the ideas you have generated in column 2 ask yourselves these questions:**

* What resources do we have?
* What opportunities do we have?
* Who can we work with?
* What are the resourcing challenges we face?

 **COLUMN 4: REVIEW**

**Looking again at your ideas in the first three columns, ask yourselves these questions:**

* Is this a step of faith?
	+ Are we being encouraged to get out of the boat/let out the nets?
* Where is the creativity of joy?
	+ Are we being encouraged to dream? Think outside the box? Explore new ideas?
* What might we imagine together? (not ‘what is’ but ‘what if’?)
* Is this locally transformative?
* Does this make a difference to the 1.5 million?

These questions help us to decide what we prioritise to do and what we stop doing. These questions also reflect our values, our openness to taking risks, and where our energies need to be focussed.

**Example column layout**

|  |
| --- |
| **SUB THEME** |
| **Resonate** | **Refresh** | **Resource** | **Review** |
| What do we hear?How does this resonate?What does this language mean to us? What challenges us? What are we already doing?How far along this story have we already travelled?What dreams do we have that would give hope to us and to our community? | What do we need to refresh? What can we build on? What can we grow? Where do we want to get to?What can we do now/next?What is distracting or hindering us?What might we lay down or stop doing?What else could we do? | What resources do we have?What opportunities do we have?Who can we work with?What are the resourcing challenges we face? | Is this a step of faith? (Are we being encouraged to get out of the boat/let out the nets?)Where is the creativity of joy? (Are we being encouraged to dream? Think outside the box? Explore new ideas?)What might we imagine together? (not ‘what is’ but ‘what if’?)Is this locally transformative?Does this make a difference to the 1.5 million? |

**SESSION 2, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**GROWING BRAVER, FULLER FAITH**

**Pause**

In the light of your discussions, pause to spend time celebrating those moments in ministry where we have felt ourselves growing a braver, fuller faith in our daily walk with God, and have become strengthened as individual disciples, and as a church.

**Reflect**

What do you want to thank God for on your journey so far?

Thank God for his blessings and his constant presence in the challenges you face today. Reflect on moments of doubt and despair, times where you have grown in courage, and as a result, experienced your faith becoming braver and fuller.

What is the next step that Jesus is asking you to take as you follow Him?

Reflect on how He equips and enables us to not only be disciples but to make disciples.

**Ask**

Ask for the Holy Spirit to come into those situations which are calling us to be brave and to step out of our comfort zones, in faith.

**Yielding prayer**

Father, send your Holy Spirit, fill us with your power and transform our hearts so that we may walk with a braver, fuller faith in the direction that you are leading us.

We reach out for your strength and guidance, trusting in your will for the future of our Church and the glory of your Kingdom, here in *(place name)* our community*.*

In the name of Christ, Amen

**SESSION 3, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**BLESSING 1.5 MILLION LIVES, ONE LIFE AT A TIME**

**Pause**

Bring before God, those opportunities and challenges that have come out of your discussions.

Be thankful for the blessing you have received and celebrate the opportunities you have to be a blessing.

**Reflect**

Think about the circle of people around you, those you live and work with. Who has

he has put on your hearts or given you compassion for? How can you bless them?

Think about the people that God keeps putting in front of you? Is there something that he is calling you into or equipping you for?

**Ask**

Ask God to bring to mind someone who has annoyed or challenged you recently. How can you pray for them, and seek to bless them?

Pray for opportunities to reach out to those people closest to us who do not know Jesus or who have turned away from faith. Ask for courage and creativity to be a blessing.

**Yielding prayer**

Father God, there are so many people that know me, but don’t know Jesus. Help them to know Jesus because they know me. I pray that as continue in my walk with You, I will also be a blessing to those I meet today.

[Let the light and love of Jesus shine so brightly within me that on the outside it will illuminate You for all to see.](https://christianstt.com/prayer-walking-in-the-light/) I want to be that person, Lord, who others can look at and just know that Christ lives in me.

In the name of Christ, Amen.

**SESSION 4, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**TRANSFORMATIVE LOVING SERVICE (IN PRACTICE)**

**Pause**

Bring before God, those opportunities and challenges that have come out of your discussions.

Be thankful for the opportunities you already have to serve others, to be salt and light in your community, and to bring about Kingdom transformation in your own context.

**Reflect**

What are the problems that need fixing in your community?

Are there simple things you could do to make a visible difference?

Is there one person you could help or simply hold out hope for at the moment?

Think about the opportunities to serve that God keeps putting in front of you? Is there something that he is calling you into or equipping you for?

**Ask**

Ask God to help you to put your faith into action in your schools, colleges, workplaces, churches, and communities, following your perfect example of servanthood.

Pray for an opportunity to help someone you don’t know and see where it leads.

**Yielding prayer**

God of all love, you first loved us and called us to love one another.

Break our hearts for the things that break your heart: that we may see the broken, the hurting, the lost, the afflicted and the marginalised with your eyes. Lord, you died for them. We pray that our communities might be transformed by loving service done in your name and for your glory.

In the name of Christ, Amen.

**SESSION 5, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**ENGAGED LOCALLY, WORKING TOGETHER IN LOVING GENEROSITY**

**Pause**

Bring before God, those opportunities and challenges that have come out of your discussions.

Be thankful for the other churches or organisations that you are in relationship with and celebrate the good things that have come out of those partnerships.

**Reflect**

Who else cares about the areas of need in your community?

How could you come alongside and work with them?

If you “pray looking out of the window” what can you see God already doing in your community? How could you join in, rather than doing your own thing?

**Ask**

Ask God to show you what is on his heart for your community.

Pray for opportunities to build relationships with others, to work in partnership, and to seek unity.

**Yielding prayer**

Thank you, Lord for the communities in which we live.

Help us to love and bless our neighbours and to show them Jesus through word and deed. Help us to be generous and tender hearted and to practice hospitality.

Give us grace to learn from others and to seek to work in partnership with others who share our concerns.

We pray that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit. Give us your words to say and help us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

Amen

**SESSION 6, WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO US …**

Here are the seven things that we identified as being important to us as a Diocese.

These are the things that we said we were hearing, and agreed were most important.

1. **We believe in the Gospel.**
2. **We believe in the local and seek transformation.**
3. **We care about the environment, locally and globally.**
4. **We want to engage with young people and the ‘disconnected’.**
5. **We want to do bigger, better, bolder things together simply.**
6. **The 1.5 million people in our diocese matter.**
7. **We want to build new communities of faith.**

Hopefully, in the previous exercises, you have generated a list of missional activities under each of the four sub-themes. These may be things you have been doing for some time or things that need a refresh or could be reinvigorated. Or they may be completely new ideas that you feel God is calling you to.

Have a look at this check list and identify where the things you have discussed align with what we identified as being most important in the diocesan vision.

Group these ideas, activities, and initiatives under these 7 areas, and then ask yourselves these questions:

* Are we still hearing the same things locally and together?
* Where are you already active and growing?
* Where are the differences?

**Highlight the things on your list which you could focus on to develop first, the things that may take longer and the things that you may need to lay down for the time being. You may like to use red, amber, and green colours to identify these priorities.**

**SESSION 6, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO US …**

**Pause**

Bring before God the emerging ideas and plans that have come out your discussions.

Thank him for the things He has highlighted, encouraged, or challenged you about. Celebrate that God still speaks and guides us.

**Reflect**

Think about the things you are excited about. How has your heart been “strangely warmed”? How can you start to pray into these ideas, to see how you can be actively involved?

Think about the things you are wary of. If these are important, and we feel God is calling us to do these things, where do we need to exercise more trust?

**Ask**

Ask God to fill you again with His Holy Spirit. Offer your ideas and plans into His hands and commit to continuing to seek Him for guidance as we move forward.

**Yielding prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you that you love us beyond our imagination, and that you call us into partnership with you to bring about your Kingdom here on earth. Help us to trust that you will provide all that we need to accomplish the things that you call us to.

Lord Jesus, thank you that you show us how to live, and to walk in daily trust and loving obedience to the Father. Help us to match our stride with yours, so that we can travel together, and just do the things that God gives us to do.

Holy Spirit, thank you that you inspire us, transform us, equip us, and empower us to do the things we have been called to so. Fill us afresh today and help us to keep relying on you for strength and wisdom.

Amen.

**SESSION 7: DOES THIS MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE 1.5 MILLION?**

We have touched on this with our themes, previously.

‘Does this make a difference to the 1.5 million?’

This is the key question that underpins our vision and will test our continued discernment and decision making.

Discuss how the 1.5 million breaks down in terms of numbers at a local level for you.

* How useful are these figures?
* What does ‘make a difference’ mean?
* How can we make them mean something personally to each one of us?
* What’s the most useful way of reminding ourselves to benchmark everything we do against this question so that we can keep focussed?
* How can we be encouraged to use this question to be more effective?
* How can we become accountable to each other in our missional discipleship?
* What help do we need?
* What’s going well? How do we celebrate success?

**SESSION 7, SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER**

**DOES THIS MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE 1.5 MILLION?**

**Pause**

In the light of your discussions, pause to spend time celebrating those moments when your church has made a difference to the people in your parish.

Thank God for the opportunities He is giving you to be a light that shines in your community.

**Reflect**

Reflect on how “making a difference to the 1.5 million” might be helpful in focusing your own prayers and actions going forward.

Consider how you can regularly incorporate this question as together you prayerfully consider what to prioritise and focus on?

**Ask**

Ask God to show you how he sees the world he has made, and how much he loves the people who we live amongst in our diocese.

**Yielding prayer**

Lord God, you love the world so much that you gave Your son so that all who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life.

Inspire us again to make the most of every opportunity to explain the reason for the hope that we have in Jesus.

Motivate us to leave the safety and comfort of our lives to seek those who are lost.

Give us grace to welcome the prodigals returning home to you, even when it means our situation may need to change to accommodate them.

Remind us that you gave Your love to us freely and help us to share that love freely with all those we meet.

In Jesus’ Name,

Amen

**KEEP IN TOUCH!**

We’d love to hear how your local discussions are going and whether these exercises were useful?

Please send any feedback and further ideas to Peter Froggatt, Director of Outreach, peter.froggatt@chester.anglican.org

**Support for parishes**

The team at Church House are here to help you in your ministry:

Here are some helpful contacts – please get in touch. We’d love to hear from you.

Director of Outreach: Peter Froggatt

Director of Ministry: Simon Chesters

Treasurer support network: Sharon Taylor Booth

Digital Giving advisor: Bessia Kanengoni

Buildings advisor: Sheena Wilson

Diversity & Inclusion: Vanessa Layfield

Mission advisor: John Hellewell

Children & Young Peoples Advisor Katy Herrera Foncesa

Communications: Stephen Freeman

Schools: Jenny McIlveen (Christian Character & CPD Officer)

Human Resources & Finance: Maxine Southwick

Safeguarding: Sean Augustin

Diocesan Advisory Committee,

Churches and Churchyards: Katie Purvis

Vision and Strategy Jon Pocock