

Resourcing the Mission of God in Lancashire

Notes

17 March 2018

1. Welcome, introduction and Gathering Hymn

The event started with a welcome from Bishop Julian who explained that in order to further Vision 2026 and to make it a reality, it needs to be resourced. He welcomed the keynote speaker, Canon Dr John Spence.

There was a reading from Hebrews Chapter 11, verses 1-16 and prayers for a successful day.

2. Bible Study

The session was led by Bishop Philip and Canon Fleur Green and included a reading from Matthew Chapter 17, verses 24-27.

The main messages included:

- God gives us (his children) everything free, purely and simply out of love.
- We give, because we have a generous God who gives to us. We are challenged to give back and should want to give back cheerfully and joyfully. We only give back what is given by God.

3. Keynote Speech by Canon Dr John Spence

Canon Dr John Spence, Chair of the Finance Committee of the Archbishop's Council Finance Committee, provided an entertaining keynote speech, reflecting on his personal challenges, the time he spent at Lloyds TSB, where he held various senior roles, and with the Church of England. This can be listened to [here](#).

Some aspects of interest include:

- How to develop a strategy for growth
- The current work of the Archbishop's Council and the support available for dioceses.
- The simplification taskforce
- Reimagining ministry
- Setting God's People Free
- Current initiatives aimed at young people
- Strategic investment bids

4. Discussion Groups

The audience split into small groups to discuss the following questions:

What is the most surprising thing you heard John say?

What is the most challenging thing as a diocese which you heard him say?

5. Question and Answer Session

A Q&A panel, consisting of Canon Dr John Spence, Canon John Dell and Bishop Julian were asked various questions. These included:

Do you think we would be more effective as churches if lay had more of a mindset of being disciples not volunteers?

Yes. Setting God's People Free is aimed at helping the lay to be disciples at all times of the day. It will require a change in culture. The lay are equal disciples to the incumbent and not assistant disciples.

Do you have any guidance for traditional churches wanting to attract a younger cohort of attenders?

Young people are living in a social media world beyond comprehension. It's about engaging with them in ways that will bring them into the fold. The (central) Digital Team are training dioceses in how to use digital media and tools. There are ways of attracting younger people without compromising the main aspects of the Church that we would like to remain.

Much time is spent on fulfilling the managerial role. It is difficult to find time to focus on mission, yet we are not being radical enough.

This requires a culture shift. There was an investment funding project carried out in Sheffield where vicars in rural parishes were given admin support to help free up their time. However, this didn't happen because they couldn't give up the admin work. Priests seem to find it quite hard to give things up, but if it's good enough for a doctor's practice to give things up then why can parishes not do the same?

Banks branches are closing across the country as we are encouraged to do more and more digitally. We may not go for a chat with our bank manager any more, but that is precisely what people want from their parishes.

The key is to use digital means to entrap people and then to engage, inspire and bring them into the fold. Three measures matter – the average weekly attendance, the worshipping community and the reach. We will always struggle with reach but it doesn't matter how we do it.

In some parts of the Diocese, many worship in places which couldn't really be described as communities. Most of properties are rented. People stay for a year then move on. This doesn't help much when trying to engage people, although it is hoped they will engage somewhere else when they do go.

The work on our Outer Estates is aimed at helping people in these communities. The people involved with these projects are to be congratulated for transforming the sense of community there. For many, it may be the only sense of stability they will experience.

6. Outline of the Future

Canon John Dell provided his thoughts on the future of the Church within the Diocese. This can be listened to [here](#).

Topics covered included:

- Challenges hitting parishes - including falling regular weekly attendance, aging congregations, rising parish assessments and paying the bills
- Challenges facing the Diocese - including the amount of parish assessment requested and received
- National Church Funding
- Clergy retirements and numbers of new curates
- Housing, wages and stipends
- Growth within parishes
- Stewardship
- Success stories and signs of encouragement
- Committing to Vision 2026

7. Leadership Strategy

Bishop Philip's discussion on the Leadership Strategy can be listened to [here](#).

The main themes were:

- Declining trends. Reducing vocations. Smaller. The actuaries and the spreadsheet people would say that's what we need to plan for. But this forgets the Gospel. Renewal is not just possible it is inevitable and renewal will come from the margins.
- Are we going to plan for growth or decline? The Leadership Plan being developed plans for growth and includes:
 - Vision of leadership
 - What we want to achieve
 - How we are going to achieve it?
 - How we will deploy clergy
 - What if it doesn't work?
 - What does it require?
- Here's another future. 2026. 50 more congregations. More Christians. More lay leaders. More priests. There are plenty of healthy growing churches in the Blackburn Diocese – of all traditions. If we can grow some local churches, why can't we grow a Diocese?

8. Questions and Answers

Bishop Philip invited questions. These included:

How long can the parish share system survive to plant congregations? And if we do manage this, how do we engage with young people who do not have the same allegiance to the parish church and system as older people?

Trusting in growth from the bottom upwards is better than imposing grand systems. Some areas will have a traditional plan, some will have imaginative local solutions. Plans should be determined by local churches on the ground.

With aging and declining populations, and increasing parish share assessments, clergy can constantly be asking the congregation for money. Sometimes they ask why the Church Commissioners or the Diocese do not help from the reserves they hold.

The Diocese's has approximately £5 or £6 million held in free reserves. A significant amount is needed to cover cashflow. The remainder is in housing which is needed for our clergy.

Our financial problem is caused by decline. The increase in share last year was 2% but there was an additional increase caused by miscalculated RWA in some parishes. The outcome of this meant that some parishes ended up with larger increases. The solution lies in being better disciples, being witnesses and focussing on young people.

9. Reflection on the Diocesan Situation

Mr John Spence reflected on discussions. This can be listed to [here](#).

In summary:

- Don't fall victim to the misbelief that the Church is inevitably going to decline.
- The core of the Church Commissioners' money comes from the Queen's Bounty. Whilst they are restricted regarding how much they can distribute, they are in discussions regarding help for those who are struggling the most. The Church Commissioners give away £24 million each year to enable growth in Christ.
- We need to reimagine our giving and watch RWA carefully. The pattern of giving from the young is more spontaneous and contactless card systems may be one option worth looking at.
- Have faith and it is the Holy Spirit that will take us forward.
- It is sometimes difficult to get people to come to the north and there are more ordinations in the south. Go out to find the people who are right rather than wait to see if they come or not.
- We are borne of an ever-generous God. Do what he (John) did when he lost his eyesight - be certain about the things you cannot see and be clear about the things that you want.

10. Share Review – Progress to Date

Archdeacon Mark's update on the work of the Parish Share Review Group can be listened to [here](#).

Key points included:

- The 82% of all parishes who contributed to share in full last year are hugely appreciated.
- We need to change the culture of the Diocese from 'debt and obligation to one of generosity, gift and grace'.
- Tweaking the parish share formula won't work. When we are making a difference Monday to Friday within our communities and families, then the giving will happen. We want to help our parishes be communities of blessing.
- Generous giving arises not from being told how much it costs to keep the show on the road, but because of a deep, personal response to the generosity, gift and grace of God in Jesus Christ.
- Our language needs to reflect this. Support will be made available when speaking to congregations about giving.
- Discipleship will be the clear focus of work on Vision 2026 next year.
- When God gives us a big vision, we are also part of the answer to the prayer.

11. Questions and Answers

Will there be an interim report issued for comment before any changes are implemented?

Bishops Council has asked for an update from the Review Group in April. Further work will then take place in May and June, followed by a report to Diocesan Synod in July. If there is to be a wider consultation, the Directors would need to decide on this.

It is difficult to find professionally qualified volunteers such as treasurers and independent examiners. One of the reasons is because the year-end for parishes falls when accountants are very busy with their day jobs. Changing the date of the year-end for parishes could help a lot.

This is a very valid comment which should be flagged up with National Church. Some work is planned within the Diocese aimed at freeing up parishes around aspects of governance, admin and finance.

Are we ready for a new, radical parish share system?

The possibility of an offer system has been explored amongst other systems. The experience from other dioceses that have moved to this has been mixed. Where there has been a high level of discipleship with a high level of leadership then it works well. However, as time progresses an offer system can fall behind inflation.

A formula along current lines is likely, but work is continuing.

Giving can drop when in vacancy. Some people think that if there is no minister, then the parish doesn't have to contribute towards parish share.

This is noted and needs to be considered. Sometimes parishes can think being in vacancy is a great way to save money.

An underlying problem is that the money is available in wallets but how do leaders motivate giving? Will there be any support from the Diocese in the future?

There needs to be a focus on discipleship and it will take time to turn things around. Part of this is renewal of prayer. Local workshops are planned to help support and equip leaders in parishes. More information will come out on this next year.

Believing in the cause is what motivates giving. Generosity will come when lives are changed. Tell some stories about what is happening and what the parish is doing to achieve change.

During his time as a parish priest, Bishop Julian wrote to everyone on the electoral roll asking what they thought they could pledge during the coming year. This helped him to plan and budget. It was also an opportunity to thank people for giving in the previous year. The letters were 'topped and tailed' in his own handwriting.

Implementing a new leadership strategy and a new parish share system at the same time may cause jarring.

The Leadership Strategy and the Parish Share Review need to be looked at together to avoid jarring. More problems could arise if they are looked at separately.

12. Conclusion

God has a plan for us and we need to be positive towards God's call. We all need to encourage one another to be disciples of Christ. If we do this, the financial challenge will sort itself out. However, prayer is key. It is not wrong to pray for the resources that we need.

Bishop Julian thanked Canon Dr John Spence and brought conversations to a close.

The day concluded with prayer.