

Can you identify three priorities that we have now for St John the Divine, Horninglow?

Can you identify three challenges that we face?

What?! Out of all the things we **could** be doing, or feel we **ought** to be doing – how can we narrow that down enough to pick three current priorities and three challenges?

Well, let's try narrowing this all down to nine particular areas:

- Could each one of us who is part of the St John's church family attract **one** new person to come to church with us in the next six years, up to 2030?
- Could we set up one new worshipping community (possibly a small group of people meeting once a month to pray and worship together) in our Deanery each year up to 2030?
- Could we create a culture of people being encouraged to respond to God's calling to some form of ministry (not necessarily ordained ministry), so that the Diocese of Lichfield could have 60 new licensed ministers each year?
- Could we draw up a plan for how we will engage with the community beyond our church walls, which we will review regularly to keep it fresh and lively?
- Could we make a connection with every primary and secondary school in our parish?
- Could we train someone between the ages of 18 to 30 to take on a leadership role in the church – on the PCC, as a church officer, or in some other role in guiding the life of St John's?
- Could we get the age profile of St John's to reflect the age profile of the community in which we are placed?
- Could we be (or are we) a church in which its diversity reflects the diversity of the community around us?
- Could our Diocese become more diverse in the people involved in its governance?

In a more shorthand form, how are we **engaged with our community** (or communities), are we **becoming more diverse**, are we **growing younger** and are we **purposeful about telling the story of our faith**, of God's love for all people?

Since before my arrival here last November, Tutbury Deanery has been involved in the diocese's Shaping for Mission initiative. Seeking ways to equip us as churches to serve our various people and places in a way fit for the times we are in.

This has now been developed into a 'Strategic Framework' for the diocese, from now until 2030. It was outlined to members of PCCs at one of a series of events that I attended at Rocester on Saturday, 29th June. Sadly, I was the only representative of either of the PCCs in our benefice to attend.

I'm not a fan of language like 'Strategic Framework'. It can so easily be dismissed as catchy business-speak, or as something that 'those in the diocese' are doing but which has little or nothing to do with us.

Bishop Matthew, leading the Rocester event along with Archdeacon Megan, encouraged us to think of this **NOT** as '100 new things parishes have to do'. Rather, he gave us the image of it being more like a road-map to guide us to fulfil what Jesus asks of us: to go and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to follow Jesus' example and instruction – what is referred to as the Great Commission (Matthew 28.16f).

We may well be doing some of these things already, which means we have found some of our priorities. What is it that we are doing, and how are we getting on?

Bishop Matthew reminded us that the challenges we face as a Church are acute, and made even more acute by the Covid pandemic.

Of the population of the Diocese of Lichfield of two million people, only 0.9% of them attend Church of England churches.

A report being presented to General Synod this month (July) reveals that Church of England attendance figures are down 19% since the pandemic (almost one in five people) and 29% below the figure for 2015. The number of regular givers has fallen from 538,000 in 2015 to 480,000 in 2019 and just over 400,000 today. Vocations have fallen by 40% since 2019, with fewer than 350 ordinands (people being trained for ordained ministry) beginning training in 2024 compared with the original hoped-for figure of 650.

These challenges are, as Bishop Matthew said, acute. But we can begin to face them by taking bold, but **small and achievable** steps along the road-map in the areas most suited to our parish.

And if anyone is tempted to think that none of this affects us, think again:

Every PCC is being asked to discuss the nine areas of the framework, to identify three current priorities (which may be things we are ALREADY doing, remember) and three challenges. Each PCC should then let Bishop Matthew and Archdeacon Megan know what we have identified by the beginning of October.

This will then give a more focused picture of what's happening in the parishes (because each parish is different), so that the diocese centrally can tailor the help it can give to the parishes.

If we think this doesn't matter or apply to us, or we can ignore it, I would encourage us to think again. I expect this framework (which is also outlined in the diagram, below), will have a bearing on how resources of the diocese will be targeted - resources of expertise, people and finance that we might well want to call on in the future, and which will support us in our life and mission.

Let us remember that we are being urged to think about **bold**, but **small and achievable** steps we can take, here.

And let us always remember that Jesus, in giving those who would follow him the Great Commission, ended by saying: 'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' **Fr Simon**



Shaping for Mission
Strategic Framework
2024 -2030

growing younger

