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## A Longer Read

### **Our Priorities: Discipleship and Evangelism**

Last month, Diocesan Synod overwhelmingly approved our 3 new principles for growth across our Diocese - Discipleship and Evangelism, Dynamic Collaborative Leadership, and Transformation of Lives and Communities.

These principles affirm our refreshed vision of Renewing Hope, Prayer, Serve, Grow and give us specific context and focus on growth across our Diocese, not just in numbers, but in faith and outreach.

Over the next weeks we will be introducing each of these in turn to you and while they may already seem familiar, we are welcoming the chance to name them and work across the Diocese on finding way to really focus on them.

The first principle is Discipleship and Evangelism.

As a Diocese, we have a real ambition to create and nurture a culture in which discipleship and evangelism is grown and fostered, especially in a wider environment where we are seeing decreasing numbers of children and young people engaging with the worshipping life of the church as well as aging congregations. So there a need for greater urgency in this area of our work.

In her presentation to our Diocesan Synod, Bishop Karen reflected on the need to find ways to reach out to those who do not come to church and do not have a "church" background.

[Access the Bishop's slides here](#)

She said:

"When I grew up in the late 60s and 70s there were over 250 children and young people in the Sunday school and youth group. I only wish now that things had been different then – that the church had not rested on its laurels thinking they were doing well, that it had not just left it to the parents whose children came to church – like mine, to take them to it to experience faith for themselves. I wish more had been taught about faith being living and not just 'stories in an old book'.

"And the result, well I think 3 of us might have been ordained, and those who had believing parents may have linked into the life of the church sometime, but for the rest they obviously did not think their experience important or relevant enough to teach their own children, what they themselves had been taught. If they had then things would be very different now, and not the 2 or 3 missing generations we have now who do not even know the story, yet alone the good news it offers."

But she said as a Diocese we weren't giving up:

"We have lost the children from our churches, but we have huge opportunities within our schools, to share faith, to help children and young people experience prayer, and worship and through inviting them in to experience faith themselves and come to baptism and confirmation.

"Our confirmation numbers continue to be high too, compared to other parts of the church."

Research collated recently has enabled a Mission Map of England to be drawn up by the central church. It shows Core Anglicans make up just over 2% of the population. But those who interact with the church through life and community events, our cathedrals and of course at Christmas is around 10 million. Most of these believe in God, but faith is intermittent and not part of daily life.

Bishop Karen added:

"We have a challenge on our hands! And the reality in going forward is that the cultural fringe, the people we have relied upon to come sometimes, is the group that is decreasing the most.

"The good news for us is that a lot of that fringe for us are still there. This chart shows the growth of our attendance at Christmas and at Easter in 2018. 3.9% of our population attended church at Easter and 7.9% of the population at Christmas, which is the third-highest percentage in the Church of England.

"Fresh Expressions of church are making a difference, but how are we sharing our story, the Christian story with those around us? We have huge opportunities in our neighbourhoods to interact with households. Through the groups we belong to, the people who live in our towns and villages, with whom we work, to deepen their discipleship, and encourage them in Christian leadership and to, through them, transform lives and communities."

Synod has welcomed the intention to find ways to encourage and develop discipleship and evangelism not just in the church and school, but in our homes as well, because our discipleship and evangelism needs to reach out across all generations, with relationships at the heart of all we do.

As a Diocese we would love to see confident Christian communities, whose growing outreach and vocation overflows from their worship - and whose buildings are a gift to this common life.

It is a simple equation - if we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others, this in turn will allow them to become witnesses to the story themselves, and as this sharing and witnessing continues onwards and outwards, we will grow.

To help this happen, we have identified 4 areas where, as a Diocese, we would could work together on our shared ambition and find ways to increase discipleship and evangelism, and in a host of differing ways that work in our differing contexts.

So throughout the Diocese we are asking ourselves how we can play a part in this journey.

To help with this we are offering some simple invitational questions that can help us with these ambitions.

How might we inspire people of all ages to engage with their community and witness Jesus Christ within and beyond their church, and where this is happening successfully, how might we share our best practice?

How can we embed the Bishop's commitment to be a national 'Growing Faith' trailblazer in all we do, embracing children and young people's passions, enthusing them and enabling them to explore and find faith?

We welcome ideas and examples of how we can create opportunities for spiritual encounter through the partnership between home, church, and school and across all generations.

And also extend opportunities to deepen life-long discipleship and find ways to invite all ages to explore their personal vocation and to help them to live out their Christian faith in all aspects of life.

Grapevine regularly shares everyday examples of all 3 of our priorities and some are listed below, but we would love to hear from you about what you are already doing now, and your thoughts and ideas on how we can work together on achieve our desire to encourage discipleship and evangelism across generations and the whole geography of our Diocese.

Some examples already underway across our Diocese:

The 'Real Lives' week in Wimborne has proved a huge success, with [100s of people coming along to the special mission-orientated event](#).

Have you heard of a confirmation and baptism service with [30 candidates and 30 cakes](#)?

In the year that Open the Book celebrates 20 years of sharing Bible stories with primary school assemblies, our Diocese has been [celebrating with them](#).

Youth groups can build on the [success of their Sunday School](#)