

Our Vision for the 2020's

Hereford Diocese – Proclaiming Christ & Growing Disciples

Introduction

- Our Diocesan Mission Action Plan was created in 2016 after a series of 'Follow' Events around the diocese. In 2021 we wanted to know how successful it had been and engaged in a series of listening events.
- A theological think tank did some initial thinking at the start of the pandemic about what we were learning. Listening events were held online with all the clergy and readers. A strategy review group was set up.
- Feedback from the initial suggestions from the review group concluded a longer period of listening was needed, especially as COVID was continuing to hamper any meaningful recovery planning.
- Surveys were put on the website, people were encouraged to feedback directly or as part of teams and specific focus groups were set for underrepresented group. This sat alongside the 10 deanery listening events held around the diocese.

Listening Findings

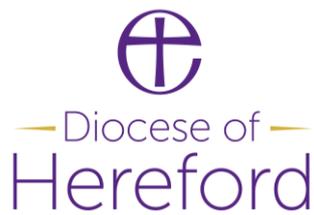
Throughout the events we received many concerns in a variety of formats but they broadly fell into the following categories:

- Finances (sustainability, giving, offer)
- Church Buildings (costs, use, maintenance)
- Congregations (numbers, age profile, young people)
- Clergy & Morale (tired, burnt out, some demoralised)

Truths

The Diocese is determined to support the parish structure, keep churches open and maintain a Christian presence in every community but the listening events have led us to need to face the following truths / realities (*source - Statistics for Mission & Diocesan Annual Accounts 2021):

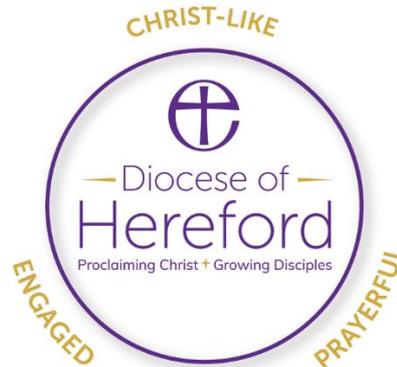
- Our Sunday attendance figures have declined by roughly 24% between 2019-2021
- There are very few children at most acts of worship on a Sunday. The mission statistics are grim but the reality is even worse.
- Most of the children and young people we are in contact with are through schools, and to a lesser extent outreach events like Messy Church
- Outside urban centres the average Anglican is 72.
- There is an excessive reliance on clergy in many places
- Parish offer has not kept pace with inflation and has declined in actual as well as real terms.



- The Hereford Diocesan Board of Finance has a structural deficit of £1million per year for foreseeable future without significant reduction in expenditure. Many Parishes and Benefices are unsustainable and require the subsidy that is funded by selling assets.
- We have 72 stipendiary incumbents if all posts are filled but we can only afford 55. We are funding the rest by selling assets (land and buildings) which can't go on beyond 2025.
- We have far too many buildings and lack the finances, capacity and energy to manage them.

Cultural Change

In a crisis there is a tendency to want to do and fix things. This often leads to structural or governance changes but fails to strike at the heart of the cultural transition that is required. We want to focus deeply on the following **diocesan values**:

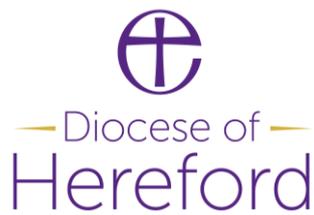


We will start by encouraging a year of prayer in 2023. This may evolve into future 'years of' (e.g. the year of the Bible to be more Christ-like or a year of generosity).

Most of what we want to see changed is best achieved by encouraging and supporting local ministry to be effective. This is about making excellent appointments to lay and ordained roles before trusting and equipping them to do their job. This strategy is mostly about creating a framework to enable the local church to flourish but recognises that there are some things that will need to be stimulated centrally due to a lack of existing capacity or resources. There will be a need to focus on smaller, intense projects in key locations rather than trying to do everything everywhere. There will also need to be pruning of the vine to maintain the overall health of the structure.

Position Statement

The Diocese of Hereford has 404 churches across 86 benefices (344 parishes). Including the Cathedral we only have seventeen churches that usually get a congregation of over 50 on Sunday's whilst 250 of our churches have fewer than 20 people attending. Only ten benefices currently cover the cost of their vicar and 29 benefices cover less than half.



Vision

Our vision remains unchanged:

“To proclaim Christ and Grow Disciples.”

Click [here](#) to view Our Vision for the Diocese.

Our Shared Strategic Aims:

A strategy:

- for buildings
- for welcoming new members and to go deeper in faith with all members
- to expand, support and equip the number of leaders, clergy and lay.
- to grow younger
- for sustainable finance through giving and asset management.

To be a sustainable Diocese we would expect to see the following bold outcomes by 2030:

1. (Growing) Many of our benefices having a least one congregation with a usual attendance of over 50 in rural areas or 100 in our market towns, with a minimum of 3% of the population attending a regular form of worship
2. (Discipleship & wellbeing) We want worshipping communities to reflect our values, to be taught to know clearly what they believe and to feel able to share their everyday faith with others. We want to love, equip and care for our lay and ordained leaders to feel supported to carry out their calling and mission to enable a Christian presence in every community.
3. (Sustainable) We want at least 200 new voluntary or lay leaders to be trained and commissioned to support our stipendiary clergy to increase our ministry on offer. We want 75% of benefices to be sustainable, covering ministry costs and contributing towards others.
4. (Younger) We want to see an increased focus on children's, youth and families alongside existing ministry with specific mission centres established that can support the wider diocese leading to growing 'intergenerational' worshipping communities of all ages.
5. (Buildings) We want to support our PCC's by creating a practical strategy to manage our buildings. We want to see many churches providing regular active worship. We want to honour and cherish our existing, smaller congregations by providing them with more regular non-stipendiary ministry but give permission for churches to close at the PCC's request.
6. We want to build on our network of 78 church schools by establishing close links between school, home and church. We will develop chaplaincy support in schools and colleges.

Our Strategy

Our action plan sets out the specific tasks required to help us achieve our vision and goals but the following text is offered by way of a narrative about the sort of thing that we will see over the course of this 5-8 year strategy.

The main premise of the plan accepts that the current model of ministry is not producing growth in numbers partly because the role we are asking our clergy to do is unrealistic and that there are not enough resources to cover what we currently have let alone increase them. This means we need to stop trying to run faster with less and re-design the whole structure.

The reality is that we need to reduce from 72 to 55 stipendiary clergy, increase the number of self-supporting and lay leaders and find a new way of treasuring our church buildings without increasing the burden on small PCC's and a reducing number of clergy.

We will do this by:

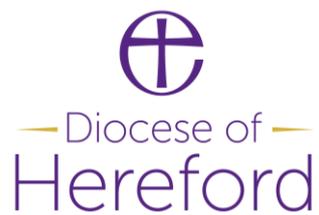
Developing a creative **deployment plan** that carefully combines benefices and deaneries in the most strategic way to avoid unmanageable benefices. This will remove 16 stipends but if we do it in a planned way, taking account of natural retirement ages it could take eight years to fully transition.

At the same time we will increase the support and training to existing **clergy** making sure they are **equipped for the future role**, regularly review their work and given manageable job roles.

For every one stipend we remove we are planning to train two **self-supporting ministers** (32) and three **lay leaders** (48). This aims to increase the level of the ministry on offer in parishes, not reduce it. We want to **release our excellent clergy to do more mission and discipleship work** and less work maintaining creaking parish structures and buildings management. We want to see a network of small groups training, praying, worshipping and learning together across the diocese.

Post – COVID we have run at an annual deficit of nearly £1m which is why the reliance on stipendiary ministry needs to change. However we will continue our highly developed **asset management strategy** to increase the value of our portfolio through creative property development, investigating new uses for land, selling poor performing vicarages / houses and getting the best investment advice. This is not about selling the family silver, it is about turning the silver into something even more valuable. In our central teams we will continue to look at our costs, find new ways to do things and set the tone for an engaged, generous, prayerful and creative diocese.

Our asset development approach has enabled us **to invest £250,000 of mission funds each year** in new projects specifically designed to stimulate growth and match fund other funders. This targeted investment is aimed at new initiatives to grow churches and congregations in our larger population areas in the hope that this rapid growth brings new energy, skills and money in to the



system that can be shared elsewhere. To date this has funded work through the intergenerational missionaries, Youth work through SPSJ, West Hereford and chaplains at the two main Hereford City secondary schools, a pioneer church plant in Craven Arms and supporting the deaneries of Kington and Weobley & Abbeydore to release the existing clergy.

Finally we will consider **new ways to keep our buildings open**. We don't want mass closures but nor can we continue to heat, light, insure and maintain our 404 churches with the responsibility for this resting on a small number of faithful members. We must find a new model and we will prioritise resources into investigating some of the emerging ideas.