

Transforming Presence - Continuing the Journey

by Revd Katie de Bourcier

We launched Transforming Presence, in 2012, as a set of questions designed to help us address the challenges we faced. We knew that the Church needed to be transformed in order to play our part in God's great work of bringing transformation to the world.

We are now looking back to celebrate the energy and creativity of parishes and deaneries in responding to this challenge. We also want to look forward, learning from each other's experience and keep a clear focus on our priorities.

Following the second 'Time to Talk' conference in 2015, we have been taking stock, and this is where we think we are on the journey.

Our priorities across the diocese remain the same:

- Inhabiting the world distinctively'
- Evangelising effectively'
- Serving with accountability'
- Re-imagining ministry.

From all we have seen and heard over these past three years, there are three themes that seem to emerge as we reflect on what God has called us to be and to do.

We want to be a Church that is ***luminous and transparent***: shining brightly in the world, and being open and transparent to each other and to God.

We are ***shaped by God and sent by God***. We are formed by his love in order to be sent out to share that love in the world as Christ's representatives.

We want there to be ***more Church for more impact***, so that we can be a transforming influence in our communities and our world. That will mean a diverse Church, with different models, different sizes, and different gifts to offer.

Inhabiting the World Distinctively

We started by exploring whether we should have a diocesan "rule of life", a set of commitments that we might all agree to live by as Christians in this diocese. But our personalities and circumstances are all different, and we realised what we needed was something less prescriptive, but more powerful in helping us each to hold onto God and live distinctively for him. And so we produced something simple and accessible: the Chelmsford Holding Cross. Thousands have been given out, helping people to pray, to share their faith, and to know God's presence with them.

The crosses are engraved with the Great Commandment, just as we long for it to be engraved on our hearts: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself".

We need now to think more about what our call to missionary discipleship means in daily life, and as we engaged with issues of injustice, poverty and caring for creation.

Alongside this, we long to be a more prayerful church. People want to know more about how to pray, and also to get to know the Bible better, and be better equipped to explain their faith to others.

Evangelising Effectively

Transforming Presence has always been an agenda for mission, and particularly for evangelism. We realised that we weren't as good at this as we should be, and so in 2013 and 2014 nearly 5000 people attended training events across the Diocese. To mark our diocesan centenary in 2014, hundreds of parishes then put on "mission weekends", and this was a great success.

But we need to ensure that this activity becomes business as usual; that small-scale evangelistic events become as normal as the Christmas market or harvest supper. We need to continue to offer training to lay people and clergy, to develop confidence in sharing the good news of Jesus.

As well as regular evangelistic events, there needs to be the right follow-up, through pastoral care and nurture courses to enable people to explore the Christian faith with others. We have reaffirmed our commitment to a "mixed economy" of fresh expressions and traditional models of Church. And we are asking emerging Mission and Ministry Units to think about what their Mission Priority Areas are.

God calls us to be faithful in the task he has set before us, and we trust that in his time, we will see fruitfulness.

Re-Imagining Ministry

Much has happened in the area of re-imagining ministry; and it is also the priority that has brought with it the most difficult headaches, and the most painful heart-aches.

But good progress has been made, particularly in terms of how churches relate to one another. Many deaneries have already come up with their plans for grouping parishes together into Mission and Ministry Units (MMUs), and others are still working on their plans. We are aiming for implementation by 2025, although many will be able to make changes sooner than that. And plans need to be seen as living documents, subject to review and change where necessary.

Each MMU will have a team of ordained and lay people working together. Often the incumbent will be shared, but there will always be a local ministry: a priest *for* every parish, and a ministry *in* every place.

Because of our baptism, we are all called to be part of God's mission. Every person, lay and ordained, has their part to play, according to their gifts, their experience, and their circumstances. Lay ministry is growing, and we want to see a huge proliferation of it.

Serving with Accountability

We have recognised that this is the priority area that is least understood and where progress has been slowest.

“Serving” sums up our call to show loving service to one another – to individuals, in our own churches, to other churches, and to our community. In doing this we reflect the servanthood of Christ.

“Accountability” reminds us that we cannot go it alone in the Christian faith. It is always “our Church”, not “my Church”. And so each church should expect to be accountable for the basic things of the gospel. The diocese as a whole also needs to be held to account.

Parishes have now been sent nine questions, to help them reflect on what it is to be healthy church in their context. This is to act as a yardstick, and a way of thinking about what progress we are making in our churches.