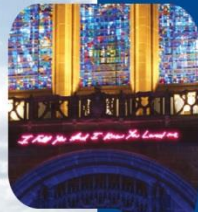
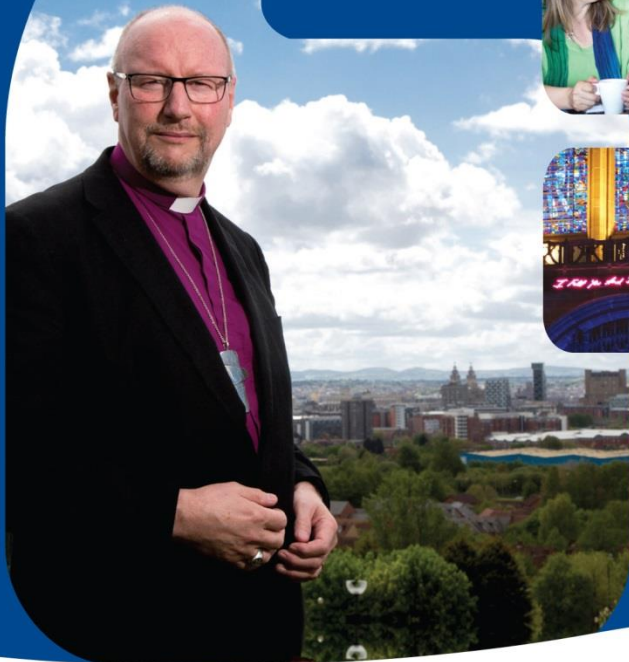
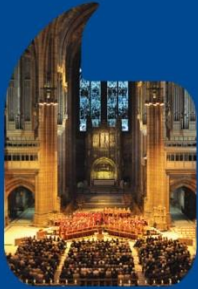


Our growth conversation

**Bigger church,
bigger difference**



Preface: "The Church unafraid"

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this."

St Paul was delighted with the Thessalonian church. The Christians there had stood firm in persecution. They were an example to others in their love. They remembered Paul affectionately. But Paul had to leave them, and the reports he received from Timothy of their life cause him to write his letter. In it he expresses his love for them, and he speaks of the end of the world, and of what Christians should do in such times. And then, at the end of his letter, he writes the words quoted above.

These words are a template for living, and I commend them to our diocese as we seek to be biblical people in our own generation. The essential questions have not changed since the Bible was written. How should we live? How should we live trustingly? How should we live effectively? How should we preach and live the gospel? And in this very early letter, the compass is set.

In our diocese we speak of asking God for a bigger church so that we may make a bigger difference. When we do that, we are speaking biblically. The New Testament rejoices in the numerical growth of the church, and in the feeding of the poor. We may want to do more than this, but I do not believe we should do less.

But in this letter we see the foundation. Paul does not speak of strategy, but of the heart. His own strategy was clear – to travel, and meet people, speak to them of Jesus, ask them to help the poor, and help them grow in their faith – and the fact that the Church is here at all is a vindication of what he did under God.

And I too aim (in my small way) to travel, and meet people, and speak to them of Jesus, and ask them to help the poor, and help them to grow in their faith. And as I have been meeting you over the last 18 months, I know from experience that you want the church to grow, so that the world may flourish.

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



But as you read this document I want you to begin with the heart and with the Scripture. Because these verses are God's word speaking to you and your heart.

"Rejoice always."

It is no part of the Christian life to be anxious. Indeed we are repeatedly and consistently told not to be afraid. We are to live in prayer and thanksgiving and peace. That is our mark. And the gospel of joy and freedom from fear is the gospel we proclaim.

"Do not despise the words of prophets."

God loves us as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us as we are. More people knowing Jesus, more justice in the world – with all my heart I believe that this is what God wants for us. And if we are to see it, we must look fearlessly and we must permit ourselves to be provoked by the word of God and by the circumstances of the world. The facts in this document are true. And God is the Lord of the facts. This is why we do not need to be afraid.

"Test everything."

The Lord speaks through his people, as we stay close to Scripture. And we need to listen to one another, since we have the Spirit. The church is a body. And every Christian man and woman and girl and boy is called by God to make sense of their own situation with the help of the Church. This is why I have asked you to read this document, and to share your responses to it. Because we learn by testing, and we test by sharing, and by listening, and by acting together.

"The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this."

Paul was writing to small, poor, diverse groups of people who would change the world. They did not know that they would change the world. But that was God's plan. And the world has indeed been changed. And it began and ended in joy and in assurance. And so it is for us; it begins and ends in joy and in assurance.

God is faithful, and if (as I believe) he wants us to continue sharing good news of Jesus and seeing justice flower, then he will do it. And he will do it through you, provided you follow him, and speak with your friends about him, and work for the justice that he brings, and share your questions and concerns with one another. This has always been the Christian way. And in our generation we will continue it.

Please read this document. Measure it against your own experience in your own community. Share your ideas with your friends in the Church. Pray for a fresh infilling of joy and assurance as you work with me and all our sisters and brothers to see God's name glorified and God's kingdom come; a bigger church making a bigger difference.

The Rt Revd Paul Bayes

Bishop of Liverpool

Eastertide, the season of the resurrection, 2016

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



Our calling

God is unchanging, but England is changing quickly. As the Church of England we are called to bring the good news of God's unchanging love to our fast-changing context. And so we must ourselves be ready to change, faithfully and confidently, and to grow as a Church unafraid.

Our Growth Agenda was launched in 2011, and updated in 2013. **We need a revised, refreshed plan for 2017.** That's what we're asking you to shape and to mould.

As a diocese over many years we have committed ourselves to 'a long obedience in the same direction'; to grow the church so that we can bring more people to Jesus and see more justice in the world. We're asking God for the creativity and grace to become a bigger church in order to make a bigger difference.

To do this we need to remain agile and ready to review, to adapt and to change. In God's strength, and listening to God's voice in God's word and in one another's voices, we will continue to 'proclaim the Gospel afresh in this generation'. So it is vital that we hear as many voices as possible: that we "test everything". As we do this **your voice is important.** We want to hear what you have to say as we move forward with our growth agenda.

This document marks the start. We talk about how far on the growth journey we have travelled. We speak about the challenges we face and some ideas for how we meet them. It starts the conversation. It sets out a timescale for keeping this on track.

We remain hopeful and confident, hopeful that the God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us¹ will continue to set before us endlessly new possibilities and new beginnings, and confident that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus².

¹ Ephesians 3:20

² Philippians 1:6

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



The road ahead

To help you help us this consultation paper briefly sketches out:

- Some current realities
- Our current response
- Areas of work where we have started but not yet finished
- Some areas of emerging challenge
- How we will have this important conversation

We hope that much of what follows is familiar and unsurprising. Most if not all the proposed developments should feel as if they arise naturally from where we have got to.

In refining and developing our direction of travel we appreciate your views.

We would like to what you think and pray about what you feel

- Is accurate and helpful about the paper
- Is missing from the paper that is sufficiently important to warrant inclusion
- We need to stop doing to create more time and space to do the main thing.

You can respond to this through the questions in Section 7

Papers such as this omit far more than they include. This paper isn't about the totality of church life and ministry. It seeks to outline progress in those areas we have identified in recent documents and lays out some potential areas for development that may make a positive, and in some cases a transformational difference.

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

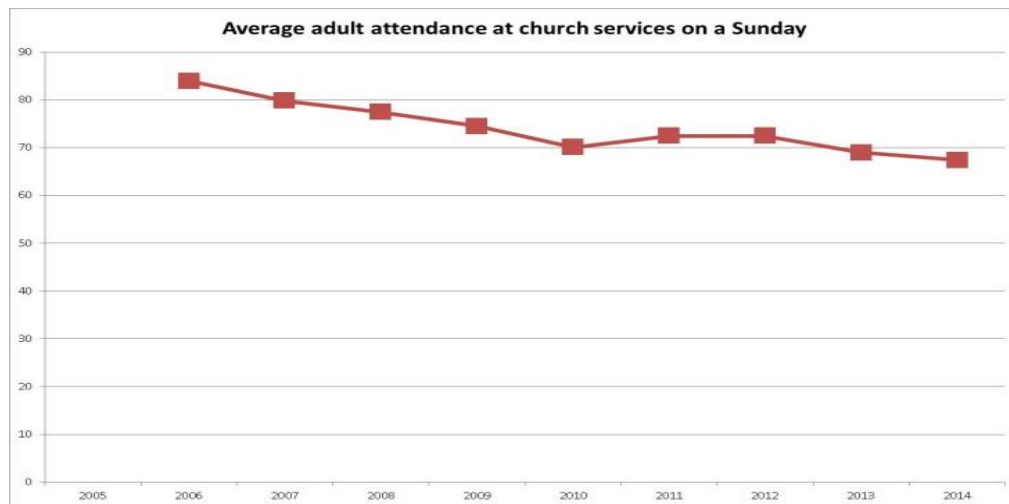
www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



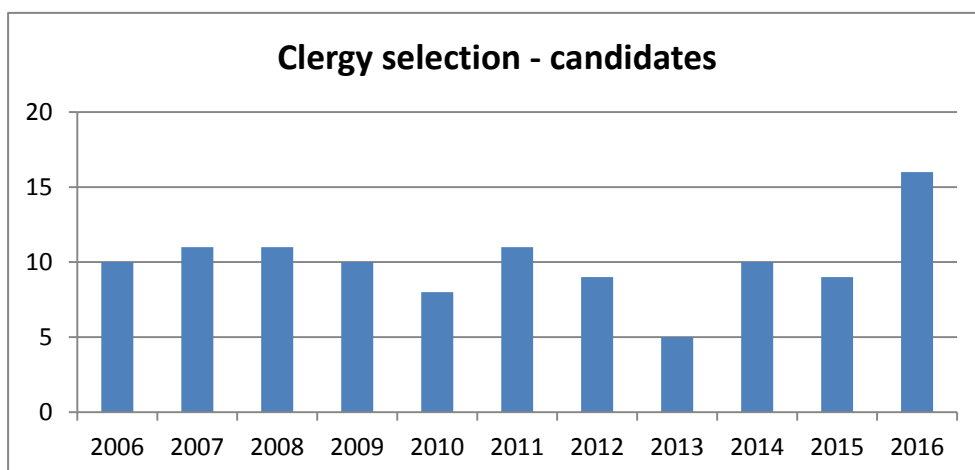
Some current realities

There are four sharp realities that the Church of England is facing both nationally and in the Diocese of Liverpool:

1. **Church attendance** has been in fairly relentless **numerical decline** for much of the past 30 years. This decline is set to continue well into the future unless something remarkable happens. As a diocese we began to reverse this decline, but have probably started to fall back into reducing attendance.



2. There is a similar **decline in the number of stipendiary clergy**. On current forecasts there will be 20% fewer stipendiary clergy across the Church of England by 2022. To express it another way, unless vocations increase then 1 in 5 of our current parishes will be in fairly permanent vacancy. As a diocese we have begun to turn this around with record numbers going forward for selection this year.



**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



3. The **church is getting older**. The average age of church attenders is 61; the average age of the UK population is 48. It wasn't always like this. 30 years ago the church was slightly younger than the population. Startlingly, only 0.6% of those aged 18 – 24 attend a Church of England church. In other words that's just 3 in every 500 people in that age group.

We're at something of a crisis point in the gap between church and young people.

4. Nationally the church has agreed that we can **no longer subsidise on-going decline**. Instead we need to use currently available financial resources to fashion a vibrant church for the 21st century.

But our priority has been and will continue to be much more than a response to some graphs. We need to continue to hear and act on God's call to grow disciples in every place who are committed to conforming their own lives to the pattern of Christ and to sharing their faith with others.

Our motivation in longing to see the end of decline and significant growth in our churches comes from a deep belief that the way of Christ really is good news for all at a personal, local and national level. Communities that live out the values of the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus have so much to offer.

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



Our Diocesan response

As a diocese we face each of these challenges. By means of our Growth Agenda we have taken steps to address them. We have in particular focused on 3 priority areas:

1. **Ageing money** – and the need to promote realistic and generous giving
2. **Broken buildings** – and the need to fashion appropriate buildings for 21st century ministry
3. **Retiring clergy** – and the need to refresh vocations and patterns of ministry

We will continue to work diligently in these areas.

Our action and achievements

We have taken the following action

- **Developing local leadership** – for example we have authorised 18 Local Missional Leaders with 5 more in the pipeline; we have c. 30 Readers in training at any point
- **Encouraging vocations** – we have record numbers on the Directions course as well as record numbers for clergy selection (over 15 this year)
- **Exploring health and sustainability with individual churches** – we have a number of churches re-imagining how they are and will be church into the future
- **Tackling the buildings issue** – we are coming towards the end of the deanery consultations of the buildings we need for the future
- **Having a good appointments base** – we have completely re-worked the clergy appointments process
- **Growing our giving base** – we have the highest levels of regular giving we have had. The average regular giver now gives £9.50 a week
- **Finding ways to make parish life, mission and ministry easier** – we have appointed additional archdeacons to help lift unnecessary burdens and to give greater support as parishes and deaneries grapple with the tough challenges we face

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



We've started so we'll finish

God has been good to us, and we are seeing some encouraging fruit. But we have to make sure that in the haste to get onto the next thing we don't leave things undone. In particular, we need to persevere with the following tasks:

- Complete the buildings assessment process that deaneries are currently undertaking to ensure that we have good buildings for the future
- Embed the annual Ministerial Development Review process for clergy to ensure clergy have a clear and supported sense of Godly priority in their work and ministry
- Embed the new parish appointments process to ensure that we get the right people into the right parish posts
- Embed the Archdeacon's Parish Review as a process of mutual learning and support
- Maintain the LifeCall and Directions initiatives to help nurture vocations expressed in the church, the workplace and the wider community
- Continue to ensure high standards in our schools, so that each generation has the best possible Christian education
- Continue with the Transforming Wigan initiative, ensuring that as a whole diocese we maximise and apply the learning from this flagship piece of work.

We also need to ensure that initiatives are properly communicated and resourced so that it doesn't feel like a torrent of under-resourced impositions bearing down on an increasingly beleaguered few. And that in any case change can be exhausting; we need to support and resource those involved.

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



What's next?

As we look forward, in addition to consolidating the work already in train, there are some major questions and emerging challenges that we will need to address:

- How can we support and resource all churches in the foundational call to make disciples?
- How do we deepen the spiritual life of our people in their own discipleship?
- How can we (equipped by a properly resourced Joshua Centre) continue to develop a culture of multiplying congregations, whereby it is normal for churches to seek to plant new congregations at regular intervals?
- How can we fulfil the vision set out in Fit for Mission of significantly larger parishes with fewer administrative burdens and greater mission freedom?
- How do we develop effective team ministries, where lay and ordained, paid and unpaid work together in leadership for the development of the whole mission of the local church?
- How can we develop more flexibility in the kinds of posts we can create and so are better able to respond to local need?
- How can we nurture a culture whereby parishes are released to experiment and call out the gifts of all God's people, where they move from a culture of church membership to being part of a movement of missional disciples?
- How do we encourage vocations to many forms of Christian service?
- How do we continue to challenge injustice and speak to and for the lost, the lost and the least?
- How can we create a culture where people are confident that they have permission to try things; that not everything will work but that's OK.
- How can we learn from the many initiatives that are taking place across the church so that we don't reinvent wheels and can learn from best practice?
- In general, how do we create a culture where people are confident that help is always available?

This implies significantly changed roles for clergy and lay people. We would look and feel a very different church. It is also a body of work that will take a generation fully to work out and implement – a continued long obedience in the same direction.

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation



Hearing your voice

As we engage with these new challenges we need to hear the voice of the Spirit through the Church. So we would value your responses to this brief document. In particular, please help us with these questions:

- Have we identified the right kinds of areas of future focus?
- What is missing?
- What is most important to you?

You may think we need a far more radical response. If you have a radical idea we would love to hear it. Hugely significant developments, such as the Oxford Movement and the Church Army, emerged from radical responses to current realities.

Or you may simply not like these proposals. But what would you do instead?

We are strongly committed to the concept of a diocese as a learning community, and so this paper will only be fruitful if you respond to it, both with positive and with constructively critical ideas. We need your responses, please, by the end of July 2016.

You can take part

- By sharing in your Archdeaconry consultations
www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation
- By taking part in our online conversations on Facebook and twitter following the mini conversations that will be launched in the bulletin.
- By emailing growthconversation@liverpool.anglican.org
- By writing to Our Growth Conversation, St James House, 20 St James' Road, Liverpool L1 7BY

And finally ...

Once we have received and considered responses we will produce a full and comprehensive strategy document in time for Diocesan Synod in October 2016. This strategy document will be put on the diocesan website at the end of September for further comment.

Assuming Synod approves the document we can then all get on with the steady and patient work of implementation. Most of all, as we walk together on this journey, please continue to pray earnestly that our loving and just God will continue to lead us as we seek to build his kingdom here in the Diocese of Liverpool. "The one who calls us is faithful, and He will do this."

**#biggerchurch #biggerdifference
#ourgrowthconversation**

www.liverpool.anglican.org/growthconversation

