

# Change and Renewal

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7. Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal  
Report to Truro Diocesan Synod  
February 2025

## 1. Introduction

At our synod meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> February there will be an opportunity to hear about key themes in the work of Change and Renewal in the diocese, and for us to hear from one another about how the work is going in our own parishes and deaneries.

This paper is intended to introduce the discussion and debate at synod, it is not a comprehensive report on everything to do with Change and Renewal. The Annual Report which synod will receive later in the year will include up to date numbers and data about progress during 2024, our February meeting will have more space to hear from members.

Some members will know a lot about Change and Renewal and will be involved in leading change in their deanery, others will know much less about this, so this paper gives some important background. If, when you have read through this, you want more specific information then let us know and we will get back to you, either for this synod or in June.

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## 2. Background to change and renewal

In 2019 Bishop Philip began to discuss five priorities for our life together as a diocese, this became the “Saints Way” which he shared with Diocesan Synod in May 2020 asking parishes and deaneries to begin to make plans based on those priorities.

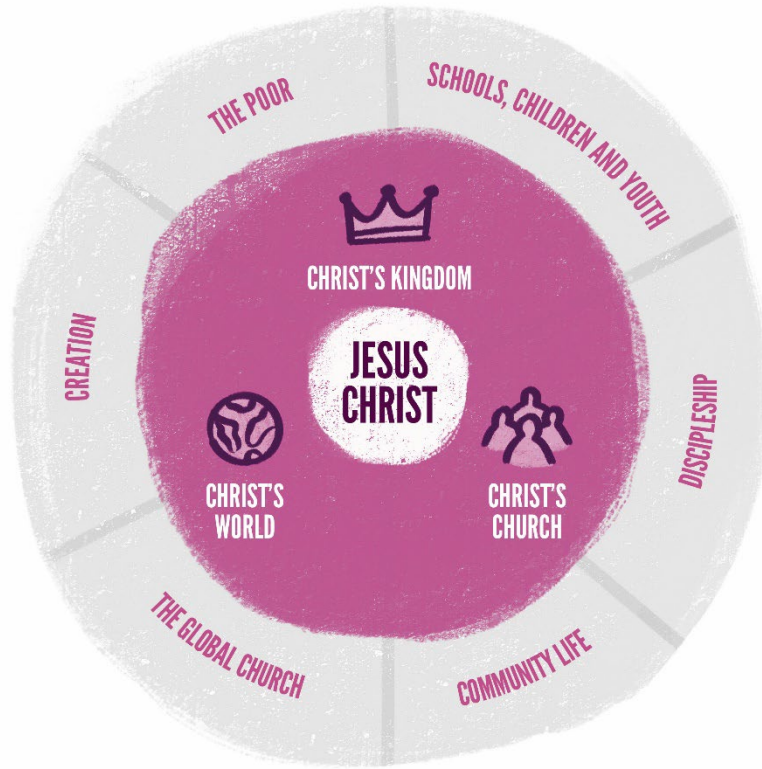
You will remember that 2020 was a challenging and sometimes frightening time for most of us. The global Covid pandemic closed our churches, we had to learn new ways to be together, the life of our communities was disrupted, many died, and many more were left frightened and uncertain. At the same time, many rallied round, many helped, and new communities were formed - particularly online.

Even before the pandemic the church in Cornwall was facing challenges. Our congregations were becoming older and smaller, year on year there were fewer clergy, many churches saw their MMF call increasing as their income was falling. It was obvious that we needed to think and pray about change.

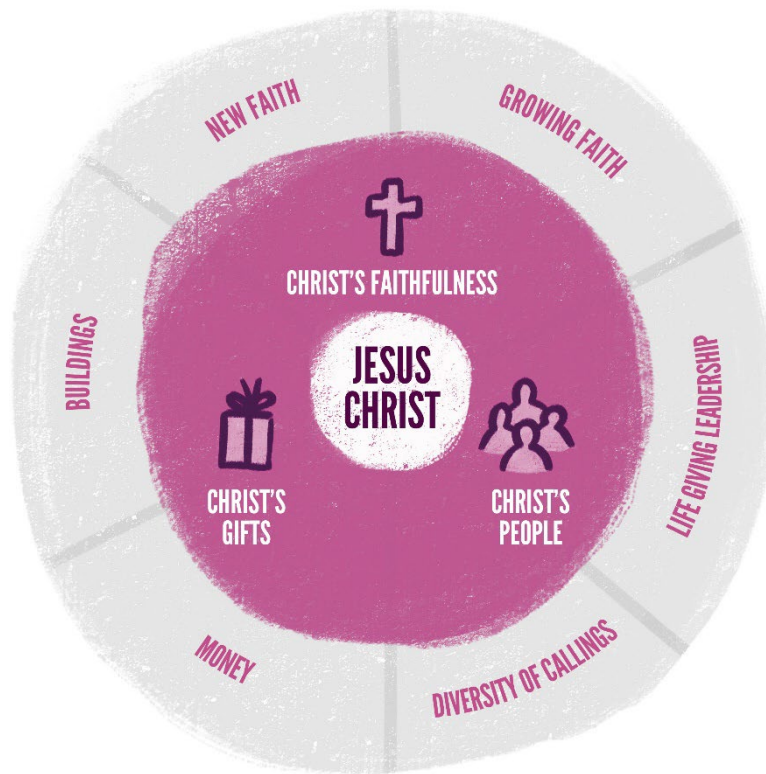
At a diocesan level the situation was becoming serious; key income was falling as costs were increasing. A new MMF formula in 2019 failed to improve collection rates, and in several deaneries patterns of ministry had become disconnected from what parishes were asking for or could afford.

## 3. Fruitfulness and sustainability

“The Saints Way” helped us to focus on becoming a church that could be more confident, it described a change in culture and a move towards becoming more sustainable and more fruitful, it began to describe how we might make plans together. To support planning across the church we did more work on those two important ideas; *fruitfulness* and *sustainability*. These ideas helped to describe what we were trying to achieve, and meant that everyone was working within the same basic framework. You can see a visual summary of fruitfulness and sustainability on the next page.



**OUR CALLING TO FRUITFULNESS...**



**OUR CALLING TO SUSTAINABILITY...**

#### 4. Top down, or bottom up?

After the “hit” of the pandemic in 2020, Diocesan Synod took the bold decision to support a budget in 2021 that used more DBF reserves to support parish life; when many dioceses increased their MMF or Common Fund call we kept ours flat and for some places (where it was obviously unaffordable) we even reduced it. We said that our reserves “give us time to change, not permission to stay the same.” These decisions were based on a serious commitment to planning for sustainability and fruitfulness.

We called that planning “On the Way”.

Each deanery was asked to make plans using the same framework for fruitfulness and sustainability. Diocesan Synod and the Bishops Council made Mission Funding and Lowest Income Communities Funding (well over £1m a year in total) available to deaneries directly for the first time; this was to support their planning, to show confidence in local leadership and to help move towards fruitfulness and sustainability.

Planning was led locally, that’s why the deanery plans are different in each deanery. In some places the priority needed to be work with the most deprived communities, in other places there was an urgent need for new work with children and young people, in most places there needed to be more sustainable models of ministry. The work to make plans and to implement them happened quickly in some places and was more difficult in other places. Some deaneries already had good plans that could be built on, others were starting “from scratch”.

To some people the plans felt “top down” - as if they had come from the bishop or “the diocese”. Sometimes this was because they hadn’t themselves been involved in the planning, or because they just didn’t agree with the plans, or more often because the overall budget for ministry did “come from” Church House.

The Church House team reminded deaneries what their MMF contribution had been in 2019, what their share of the Lowest Income Communities Funding and Mission Funding was, and what the cost of ministry was currently. We suggested that 2019 was a good year to use as a basis but some deaneries told us that they could contribute more than that (and have done so) where others told us that number looked optimistic by 2021... But in every case the plans were made by groups of local people from that deanery, lay and ordained, and in every case were approved by the deanery synod.

It is fair to say that not making a plan wasn’t an option; we needed to decide together, somehow, how to go forward. It is also fair to say that for some people it has been a shock that we have actually tried to stick to the plans and make them happen; maybe some people didn’t get involved because they thought it would all just fizzle out.

By the end of 2022 we had twelve deanery plans.

We know that this planning has opened up new opportunities and borne new fruit, it has given confidence and in many places has helped to turn a corner towards fruitfulness and sustainability. We also know that in some places the changes have been difficult, or that not much has changed. We know that for some of us just getting the basics done week by week, season by season is hard enough without new bright ideas that we didn’t ask for. And we know that sadly in some places there isn’t as much trust as we want there to be.

## 5. On the Way Deanery Planning

The church has never been short of plans and good ideas, putting them into action has sometimes been more difficult.

Synod wanted to support deaneries and parishes to implement their plans, but also wanted local parish and deanery leaders to be in control; sometimes when the diocese tries to “support” something it can feel like a takeover. In every deanery there is a small team established to help implement the deanery plan, the implementation team is all local people, and they are supported by a Project Support Officer.

The implementation teams were set up by the Bishops Diocesan Council (BDC) because as charity trustees the BDC are responsible for the use of their own funds, and funds granted from the national church and used locally (the Lowest Income Communities Funds, or LICF). BDC ask the implementation teams to report on the use of those funds. The implementation teams also report to their deanery synod on the implementation of the plan overall.

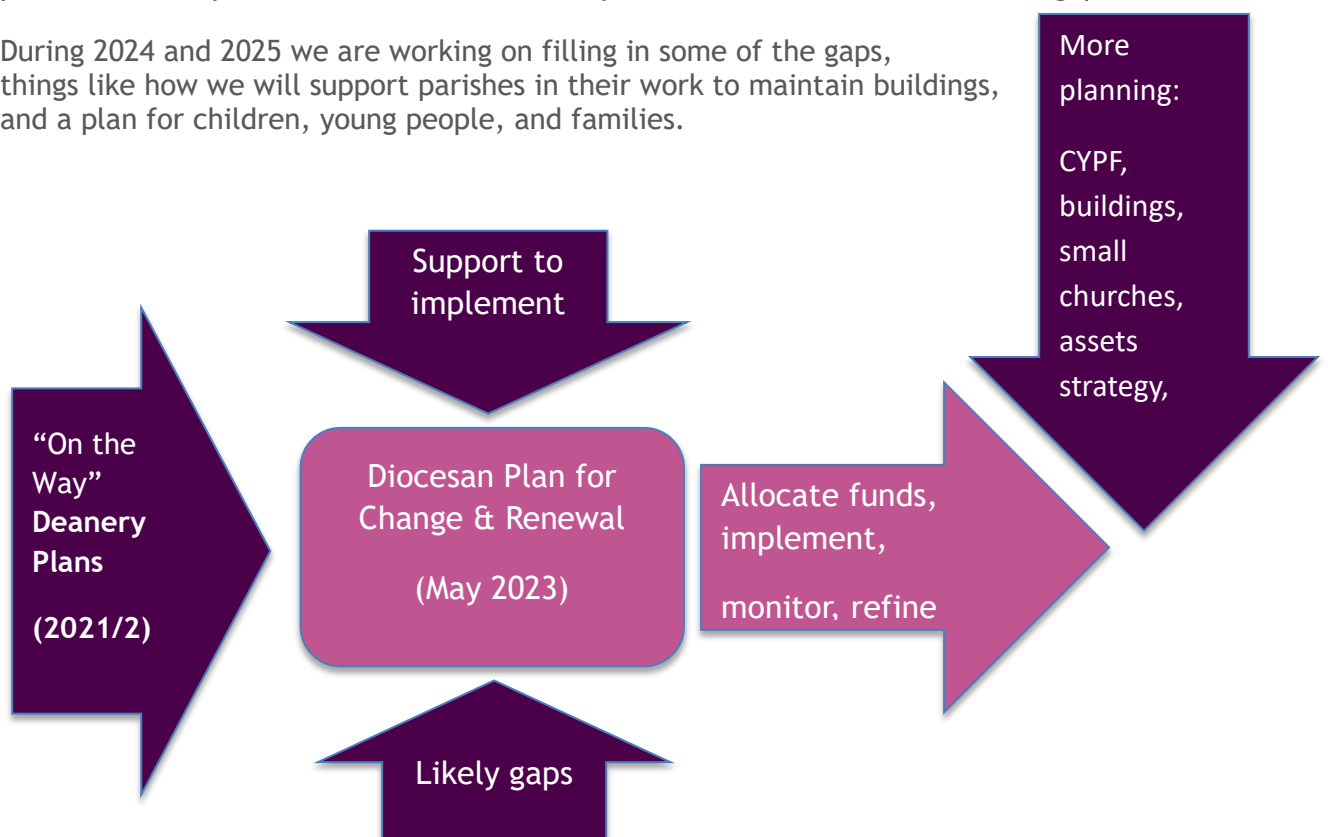
The work of implementing deanery plans varies from deanery to deanery. In some places leadership and organisation at *deanery* level does much of the work, this is often in places with smaller parishes and benefices that work better if they share resources, in other places the balance is more towards benefices and parishes with their own focus.

## 6. From Deanery Plans to a Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal

With twelve deanery plans, why did we also need a diocesan plan?

The Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal is the twelve plans combined, but we added support for implementation of the plans, and work where we thought that even if all the plans went really well, we still wouldn’t really be fruitful and sustainable - the gaps.

During 2024 and 2025 we are working on filling in some of the gaps, things like how we will support parishes in their work to maintain buildings, and a plan for children, young people, and families.



## 7. Supporting the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal

Sometimes supporting the deanery plan is about handing over money and letting people get on with what they already know how to do. In some places people just needed some training or networking. As well as this sort of support the DBF also supports with some of the strategic challenges we are facing, one of the biggest challenges is around clergy numbers.

Deanery Plans gave us the number of stipendiary clergy needed to serve the parishes of the diocese, about 60, that was a slight increase against clergy in post in late 2020.

However deanery planning coincided with the peak years for retirements, and more moves delayed by the pandemic, meaning that in 2023 and 2024 we knew we would “lose” more clergy than ever before. To make matters worse, this coincided with a steep national dip in clergy numbers and ordinations - many of the challenges we are facing are familiar to those in the rest of the church.

Parishes can't solve clergy recruitment on their own, so during 2023 and 2024 we made clergy recruitment the top operational priority for Church House; we spent more on clergy housing than ever before getting more houses ready more quickly, we freed up Church House staff to focus on supporting parishes with their recruitment work, we worked nationally to make sure that the right people knew about Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and the best bits of Devon, we organised “taster days” for prospective clergy to come and see - in person and online, and we worked on how to keep more of the great clergy we already have.

In 2024 we recruited twenty clergy to new posts, before the pandemic eight would have been a busy year. And there are already another half dozen where we made the appointment last year but they aren't “in” yet. This means that we are one of very few dioceses where the number of clergy in post is going up not down, and where the DBF is committed to sustaining numbers while looking for ways to increase numbers.

The diocesan team are working hard to support the implementation of deanery plans and the diocesan plan for change and renewal, that work gives the Church House team our priorities and was the priority in the DBF budget that synod approved last year. We know that most of the work isn't done by officers from Church House or by archdeacons or bishops, most of the work of the church takes place in local communities and churches day by day, season by season, often unseen and often by people who are doing the work for love not for pay. This will always be the heart of the church and we give thanks to God for that, and honour the faithful service of so many.

At a diocesan level the BDC established the Board for Change and Renewal to oversee the work of leading change, this Board receives reports on local implementation, holds senior leaders to account, and brings significant experience of leading change in complex organisations.

## 8. Where we are now

Most deaneries didn't get into implementing their plans until well into 2023, and of course there have been lots of clergy moves and some long clergy vacancies in that time. At best we are about 18 months into implementing 7-10 year plans and in some places it feels like much less than that. The Board for Change and Renewal receive regular updates on progress towards achieving fruitfulness and sustainability based on measures that come from the objectives on page 3.

An overall RAG rating of deanery implementation at the end of 2024 showed four deaneries with a clear "green" rating meaning that plans are in place, implementation is more or less on track, and that adequate resources are in place. These "green" deaneries all still have significant challenges, often around work with children and young people, maintaining buildings, sustaining small churches, and recruitment.

Half our deaneries, six, are overall rated "amber." Most of the six "amber" deaneries are moving towards "green" - they know what their priorities are but there remain some significant challenges to implementation that are proving sticky; the most common factors in this are delays to pastoral reorganisation, key parts of the plan that are not yet being implemented and may need to be changed, recruitment, work with children and young people, maintaining buildings, sustaining small churches, and finances. Of the "amber" deaneries we expect two or three will move to "green" during 2025 meaning that most of our deaneries will be more or less "on track".

Two deaneries are flagged as "red" in the RAG rating. Both of these deaneries have seen long running clergy vacancies and other uncertainties well into 2024, and they share all the challenges of churches in the "amber" or "green" groups. The "red" rated deaneries have fewer resources to help them to become fruitful and sustainable and in particular tend to have lacked strong consistent leadership for change at deanery level.

Our RAG rating has separate measures for the different parts of each deanery plan, and even in the "green" rated deaneries nowhere has a "clean sweep" of "green". Equally in the "red" rated deaneries there is great work going on and the faithful witness of the church continues. This rating helps us to understand where things are working and where we might want to focus resources, it doesn't tell us about the fundamental character of the local church or about the profound richness and faithfulness of God's people. That's why we don't publish a "league table" or keep a running commentary - it wouldn't help anyone, and it wouldn't tell the real story of the Good News lived out in real places.

Diocesan Synod made significant resources available to support the local church. At least fifteen posts are currently supported at least in part through Lowest Income Communities Funding and serve communities experiencing deprivation. Usually these posts would be "unaffordable" without the LICF funding.

The MMF collection rate, and the actual cash amount contributed, has improved again between 2023 and 2024, we are enormously grateful for the sacrificial and generous giving that supports this. This is one measure of sustainability and it is encouraging.

We know that to be fruitful we need to stop the decline in numbers that we have seen, and overall begin to grow again. We are beginning to see this, but the picture is patchy, the overall diocesan numbers are positive, but they obscure some places with enduring challenges.

## 9. Models of Ministry

We will hear about changing models of ministry at Synod. The plan is to have roughly the same number of parish clergy as were in post going into 2020, but with some important differences.

Parish clergy will be deployed in patterns that have been worked out locally through deanery planning. These patterns of deployment are expected to become sustainable, this means that what we ask our clergy to do should be realistic, and sustainable because we won't be asking PCCs to pay more in MMF than they can afford.

We know that in many areas for the work of clergy to become sustainable they will need to work differently. In particular we know that rushing from one church to another every Sunday and only being in one place once a month isn't just a bad experience for the vicar, it doesn't help lead or grow the church. There is evidence nationally and in Cornwall that a better model is to have a local leader in each church who is committed to that place.

This local leader model is familiar in Cornwall because it is very similar to the "People of God" work led by Bishop Bill back in the late 90s and early 2000s. Clergy ordained in the early and mid 1990s will remember something called "collaborative ministry" that was all the thing back then - these ideas are not particularly new and all across Cornwall there are churches that have been doing something like it for years.

To underpin this work we need to have confidence that clergy numbers won't start dipping again, that is why Synod has approved a ten year assets strategy that sustains clergy numbers, and why we need parishes to honour their commitment to MMF.

One of the difficulties with this approach is that most of our churches are smaller now than they were when Bishop Bill was talking about the "People of God," and the average age of our congregations and PCCs is higher. Just to make it even harder, the compliance and regulation expected of charities and community groups is much more onerous now. This isn't going to be easy, but if we want our churches to survive and flourish, and we do want that, all our churches, not just the big glitzy ones, then this is a credible way forward.

While some of us are remembering Bishop Bill and the early 2000s it is worth noting that back then there were more parish clergy, around one hundred stipendiary incumbents in post compared to the sixty we are aiming at now. It didn't somehow solve all our problems, in the ten years to 2000 the average decrease in congregation in many places was around 50%, smaller rural churches where "People of God" and lay leadership were taking root more quickly tended to see slower declines. Today some of the most remarkable growth in the church in Cornwall is in small or very small churches where lay leaders take an important role.



## 10. Children, Young People, and Families

We will say more about this at synod.

Diocesan Synod has allocated £3m of reserves to this work and we are expecting significant additional funding from the national church, perhaps up to match funding levels. We know that if we want to make a big difference the local church will need support and additional resources.

There is some important learning from earlier large-scale interventions by the diocese and national church:

- we need better balance between supporting “many churches” rather than just “a few churches”
- we need to be clear about when, how and where work with children, young people, and families will be see new members of the church
- we should work with and support existing work, not just try new things
- we need to be realistic about future local funding
- we need to be realistic about the capacity of small churches to start doing “more”

We are working on plans that deliberately support small and very small churches where there may be no children or young people in the congregation and little spare capacity. We also want to build on the excellent links we already have with schools locally and at diocesan level.

We know Cornwall has a slightly higher average age and fewer children than the national average, some of our most rural sparse communities simply have very few children living in them. Even taking this into account most of our churches nowhere near reflect the number of children, young people and families who actually do live in our parishes, and even if Jesus hadn't made children a priority we know that simply for the church to survive we need to take this work seriously.

## 11. Small Churches

Synod members will know that we asked Bishop Graham James to begin a consultation on how the diocese can best support small churches, noting that too often we seem to plan for or assume a certain size of church that is unrealistic. Many of you have been in touch with Bishop Graham already, and we will hear from him at this synod.

## 12. People Planning

We can make all the plans in the world, but without the people on the ground to put them into action they will remain just plans. The Bishop's Council recently looked at how we plan for recruitment to key roles, in particular key leadership roles that we know make a big difference to leading change.

All our plans need to take seriously the demands there already are on our clergy and lay leaders recognising that until or unless we can grow the church we will continue to struggle with being overstretched.

### 13. Future plans

The diagram on page 5 suggests further plans to support the Diocesan Plan for Change and Renewal.

The assets strategy, people plan, plans for clergy recruitment, and plans to cut carbon, cherish creation, and speak up, are in place. We are currently working on a plan for work with children, young people and families which we expect to bring to synod in the summer.

We know that we will need a plan to support parishes in their stewardship of church buildings and we will work on this during 2025, and we look forward to learning from Bishop Graham on how best to support small churches in their faithful ministry.

It is always important that diocesan leaders remember that the real work of the church takes place in local communities, schools and churches, and that the DBF exists to support that ministry not the other way round. Part of this is to make sure that “the diocese” doesn’t start doing things that are really the responsibility of the local church.

### 14. Is it working?

Is all this planning making a difference?

We can always find things to point to that show that things are different, or, if we prefer, to show that things are the same. If we want to find things to criticise or condemn then we will all have ideas about what to put on the list. Halting a decades long decline (even assuming that this is an appropriate way to describe the life of the church) is going to be very hard, and we don’t expect to see simple easy to recognise “U-turns” that we can all agree mean that things are now going in a different direction.

There are some good reasons for confidence.

- MMF collection rates went from 67% in 2022, to 90% in 2023 and rose again last year to at least 93% (final figures not in yet as I write).
- We have recruited some fantastic clergy to really exciting roles in 2023 and 2024, they had the pick of the Church of England and chose us, that is a vote of confidence.
- Key congregation data in the latest statistics for mission looks encouraging overall, not earth-shattering, but going in the right direction after decades of going the other way.
- Great people are coming forward to offer themselves in new roles; to be ordained, to be local leaders, to be readers, to be members of diocesan synod or deanery synod, to be a member of the Bishop’s Diocesan Council, to be Bishop of Truro.

Those reasons are all significant, but far more than that is the faithfulness of God who calls us and is good. The God who loves us and who loves the church in Cornwall is faithful, we may not be called to lead the church when it is powerful and glorious in the eyes of the world, so be it, but surely we are called by one who is true, called to lead and to serve in this season to his glory and in his power.