

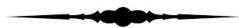


THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM
OFFICE *for* MISSION

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”



The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*



6 SESSIONS TO HELP PARISHES RESPOND TO
THE ARCHBISHOP'S INVITATION TO
UNFOLD GOD'S PLAN.

Introduction

In July and August 2021, Archbishop Bernard called us together in prayer to consider the future of our Archdiocese. He did this by issuing 'An Invitation' to reflect with him on a new Diocesan Vision designed to help us **unfold God's plan**.

The recent Synod encouraged us to look anew at our Church, in a spirit of discernment, with every Catholic being co-responsible with the clergy for the depth of our *Communion, Participation and Mission*. This meant a prayerful examination of our own discipleship, with the aim of us working together to become missionary parishes, and therefore a missionary Church.

The following contains suggestions for six sessions that break the Archbishop's vision into bite size chunks - looking at what it means for individuals and parishes, and offering ideas that can help us to respond to his invitation. The hope is to provide an opportunity to reflect on our own recent experiences, so that we can begin to discern God's will in our place. This resource also aims to encourage those on the margins to take hold of what our Archbishop, and, most importantly, our Lord Jesus Christ are calling us to do.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

It is envisaged that a small group, or groups, in a parish would work together with their priest, deacon or other parish leaders in order to discern how the Diocesan Vision might be used to help renew or refocus their mission, using the themes the Archbishop offers.

This can only be done prayerfully, which is why the diocesan prayers are suggested for use at each

'We are making a fresh beginning in a different setting, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us and inspire us as we rebuild our Church'.

- Archbishop Bernard Longley. "An Invitation" Diocesan Vision.

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meeting. Parishes could also be encouraged to pray them regularly using the copies sent out in 2021 along with the Archbishop's Invitation.

The general structure for each meeting will be:

- Opening Prayer & Scripture
- Excerpt from the Diocesan Vision document
- Short reflection and questions/activity
- Conclusion and closing prayer

Groups can be flexible in how they use the sessions, allowing more time to cover the material or to adapt resources, to make them as useful as possible for their context. In addition, parishes may have already looked at some of these themes during the Synod. At least 90 mins is recommended to cover the subject matter in each session and we suggest you take notes of what you discuss and discern.

By the end we hope that you will have been able to:

- *get to know your parish better;*
- *become familiar with the Diocesan Vision and share it with others;*
- *discern where your parishioners need formation, and appreciate the gifts they bring to the parish;*
- *consider where your parish ministries fit into the 4 Themes of the Diocesan Vision;*
- *see how your parish serves families and young people.*

The Synod provided us with a reflective model for how best to approach these issues, so do see that process as a template for getting the most out of this resource.

We hope that you find these sessions useful. Contact Paul for more information in using these sessions: paul.northam@rcaob.org.uk

SUGGESTED TIMINGS

Prayer & Bible Reflection
20mins

Excerpt from Vision
10mins

Questions or Activity
50mins

Conclusion & Prayer
10mins

INTRO



1

REFLECT WITH ME

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, Creator of the world and author of all that is good, we seek your guidance and inspiration as a Diocesan family. Give us missionary zeal in the renewal of our parish communities.

May the gifts of your Holy Spirit be the source of all formation. May our closeness to your Son Jesus, in prayer, in Scripture and in the Sacraments make us convincing heralds of the Good News. Bless our homes, families and schools with knowledge of your constant and compassionate presence.

As you shape our lives from the moment of our baptism, keep before our eyes the needs of our neighbour, and encourage us to know that your Kingdom is promised first to those who know their need for you, the ones Whom your Son chooses and calls by name. We make our prayer through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayerfully read and reflect on the passage...

Close with a simple prayer, concluding with an invocation of diocesan or parish patron saints.

'...pray for us.'

DIOCESAN VISION STATEMENT

Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

'Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still...'

- Luke 24: 13-17

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WORDS FROM ARCHBISHOP BERNARD

From the Diocesan Vision: *REFLECT WITH ME...*



TO REFLECT ON

To introduce his Vision for the future, the Archbishop first invites us to look back. How has the experience of the past few years affected our life of faith? Have we had the opportunity to share our story? Have we been able to *stop and think*? By doing this, we may discover how God has been present in our lives or shown us something of the plan He has for us and our communities. The Synod, which called us to a deeper listening to the Holy Spirit, taught us that God can use any member of the faithful to reveal something of His Will if we listen prayerfully. **Two options** are offered to help us respond to the Archbishop's invitation.

Option 1 Revisit the responses you collected from the Synod in your parish, and particularly the themes that presented themselves. Prayerfully consider...

- What might the **Holy Spirit** be saying to your parish?
- In what ways can your parish help parishioners to deepen their **Communion** with God and others?
- How can your parish encourage **Participation**?
- What opportunities for **Mission** present themselves?

Some of the questions in **Option 2** might also be useful. Note your thoughts & go to the 'CONCLUSION' below.

Option 2 If you don't have a record of your Synodal responses, consider the questions below, to build up a picture of your experiences in your parish/community. This may help you to see what God has been doing, how people may need support, and where God may

"I am delighted to welcome you, and to share our vision for the unfolding of God's plan in the Archdiocese. With all the hardships we have endured over [recent years], we are learning to deepen our trust in God's loving care and to respond in ways that show we care for each other. For many, it has also taught us to value things differently and to focus our minds on what really matters. We have had the opportunity to reflect on our faith and on the role our churches play in society. We are now making a fresh beginning in a very different setting, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us and inspire us as we rebuild our Church."

PART 1

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be calling your parish or deanery. The document in Appendix 1 - '*Living Our Faith Beyond the Pandemic*' - could help you to reflect in a more narrative form, for those that want to.

You may also consider asking the wider parish to reflect for themselves, if they haven't done so already, again using the same document. You do not need to use all the questions.

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AND DISCUSS

Past:

- *Did the pandemic help/hinder your faith?*
- *What did you learn about your parish/community?*
- *Which ministries continued/started during the pandemic?*

Present:

- *How does your parish help you to grow in your relationship with God and others? How might it encourage even more growth?*
- *How does your parish identify and use the gifts of its people? How do you participate in parish life?*

Future:

- *If you could describe your parish fulfilling its mission to spread the Good News (evangelise) and to Serve the community, what would it look like? Who is Jesus calling you to serve and reach out to today?*
- *What is your dream/hope for the future of your parish, and your role within it? What about fears?*

CONCLUSION

Armed with this information about your parish, and where the Holy Spirit might be leading you, the following sessions will help you to think about how you might go forward together. Your gifts and experiences will inform this process of discernment as you seek to see the Diocesan Vision fulfilled. We will begin looking at the Vision itself next time.

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FOR PRAYER

What intentions for prayer have come from this week's discussion? Make a note of them. Perhaps pray for them here or use them during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE VISION

S*pirit of God,*
descend on me this day.
Grant me the Spirit of joy, to lift me,
the Spirit of hope to inspire me,
the Spirit of love to surround me and
the Spirit of truth to enlighten my path.

Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
in love of you in my prayer
and in my actions towards others.

Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen



2

OUR DIOCESAN VISION

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, Creator of the world and author of all that is good, we seek your guidance and inspiration as a Diocesan family. Give us missionary zeal in the renewal of our parish communities.

May the gifts of your Holy Spirit be the source of all formation. May our closeness to your Son Jesus, in prayer, in Scripture and in the Sacraments make us convincing heralds of the Good News. Bless our homes, families and schools with knowledge of your constant and compassionate presence.

As you shape our lives from the moment of our baptism, keep before our eyes the needs of our neighbour, and encourage us to know that your Kingdom is promised first to those who know their need for you, the ones Whom your Son chooses and calls by name. We make our prayer through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayerfully read and reflect on the passage...

Close with a simple prayer, concluding with an invocation of diocesan or parish patron saints.

'...pray for us.'

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord'

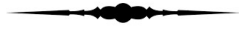
- Jeremiah 29: 11-14

Important Note: ask the group to fill in the first part of Appendix 2a (on the Vision Statement) **BEFORE** the session. The responses will help this first discussion.

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

WORDS FROM ARCHBISHOP BERNARD

From the Diocesan Vision: *OUR DIOCESAN VISION...*



TO REFLECT ON

A 'vision', as opposed to a 'strategy' or 'action-plan', has been described as: **a God-given picture of the future which produces passion in you.** Taking up the Archbishop's invitation, consider our Vision Statement using the 'QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS'.

"Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour."

To reiterate, a Vision is *not* a detailed roadmap of the way ahead but simply describes a desired destination.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

Having considered these questions prior to this session, using Appendix 2a, discuss and note your responses: *What are your first impressions of this Vision statement? What excites you most about it? Is this your dream for your parish too? What could be added? Is it reflective of your own parish vision statement (if you have one)?*

WHY IS VISION IMPORTANT?

Vision causes us to reflect on our inmost desires and dreams. It returns us to contemplating Christ's promises for us, the hopeful future He has for each person and for His whole Body. But what *difference* can that make to parish life? A good vision can help to...

"We know that together we can overcome any challenges and continue to support the Church's mission in the months ahead, working with God as our guide. We must take this opportunity to do all we can to make sure the Gospel is seen and heard through the example of our daily Christian lives."

[Read the Vision Statement]

I invite you to talk to your family, friends, teachers, fellow parishioners and parish priest about what the words mean to you and how they may help to shape your individual and collective choices and decisions"

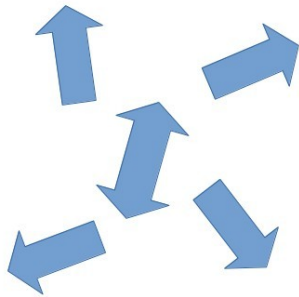
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- Unite us;
- Renew us;
- Empower us;
- Direct us;
- Involve us.

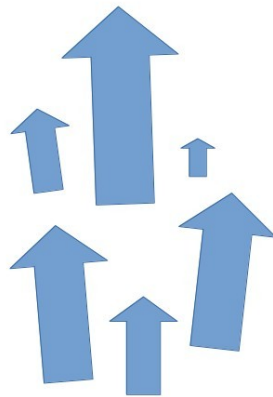
'A vision without a plan is a pipe dream; a plan without a vision is a nightmare!'

A vision has the potential to release people's gifts and generate resources, as well as unite groups to pull together. But communicating vision is a process and requires perseverance. A compelling vision can encourage people to invest both time and money in seeing aspects of that vision fulfilled. Think about your parish - which image does it most closely represent, or is it a mixture?

VISIONS



VISION



FURTHER QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

We will look in a little more detail at the words of the Vision. Using Appendix 2b, reflect on these questions:

- What does it mean to be a Catholic diocese?*
- What is the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to us/me?*
- How can we/I be faithful to that mission?*
- What is a missionary disciple? Am I a missionary disciple?*
- What is co-responsibility?*
- Our parish/school/family is a "vibrant community of faith, joyful in our service of God and neighbour." Discuss.*

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IN CONCLUSION

Our Vision describes the mission Christ has for His Church, which is to be a disciple-making 'movement' of the Holy Spirit in every time and place. Think about how to make this Vision known in your parish, to cover it in homilies and to encourage discussion around it. Not all the concepts will be familiar or immediately understood, so it may take time explaining or 'translating' it so that every Catholic can capture it for themselves. As other parishes have done, can you begin to formulate a particular vision for your parish?

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE VISION

*Spirit of God,
descend on me this day.
Grant me the Spirit of joy, to lift me,
the Spirit of hope to inspire me,
the Spirit of love to surround me and
the Spirit of truth to enlighten my path.*

*Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
in love of you in my prayer
and in my actions towards others.*

*Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.*

Amen

FOR PRAYER

What intentions for prayer have come from this week's discussion? Make a note of them. Perhaps pray for them here or use them during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.



3

MAKE A POWERFUL CHANGE

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, Creator of the world and author of all that is good, we seek your guidance and inspiration as a Diocesan family. Give us missionary zeal in the renewal of our parish communities.

May the gifts of your Holy Spirit be the source of all formation. May our closeness to your Son Jesus, in prayer, in Scripture and in the Sacraments make us convincing heralds of the Good News. Bless our homes, families and schools with knowledge of your constant and compassionate presence.

As you shape our lives from the moment of our baptism, keep before our eyes the needs of our neighbour, and encourage us to know that your Kingdom is promised first to those who know their need for you, the ones Whom your Son chooses and calls by name. We make our prayer through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayerfully read and reflect on the passage...

Close with a simple prayer, concluding with an invocation of diocesan or parish patron saints.

'...pray for us.'

DIOCESAN VISION STATEMENT

Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

'But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'

- 1 Corinthians 12: 24-27

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

WORDS FROM ARCHBISHOP BERNARD

From the Diocesan Vision: *MAKE A POWERFUL CHANGE...*



TO REFLECT ON

Some of the things we reflected on in the first session will help us, but here the Archbishop's words are particularly challenging us to consider how we might deepen our own discipleship. And implicit in that, is another question: *how might we encourage others to look with new eyes at their discipleship too?* This question has change at its heart.

Change is not something our parishes may be good at. You might recall a time in your parish, that whenever someone either moved on or 'retired' from a ministry, it was left to the parish priest or other busy parishioner to take it up. In the past you may have made an appeal from the pulpit or in the newsletter for someone to take on a particular role, only to be left with nothing to show for your efforts.

During the pandemic, many parishes saw something they had not experienced in previous years: significant numbers of people coming forward to offer support for the various ministries required to keep churches open and safe – such as cleaners, stewards or administrators. They responded with generosity when our Church was in need. In one parish 40 volunteers came forward during the pandemic to take on these new roles. If you replicate even a fraction of those numbers across our parishes, we potentially have hundreds more people volunteering in our diocese who may not have done so in previous years.

"I believe that this is an opportunity to focus on renewal here in our Archdiocese – being open to change. I am excited about helping to create a future full of missionary disciples, with clergy and lay faithful working together to create vibrant and joyful communities serving God and neighbour. I want us to look at how we will individually respond to God's call to be missionary disciples in the Church and in our local communities, working joyfully to spread the Word and the work of God. In essence, how will we unfold God's plan for our Church."

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

If a similar thing happened in your parish, that is something to be thankful for! But a question we might now ask is: **what is the future for those, and other, key volunteers?**

- *Have we been able to encourage them, to be purposeful in asking what the next step on their journey of discipleship is?*
- *How can our parish support them to continue with the ministries* they began, or to equip them for other important ministries that our parish needs?*

Take some time to discuss who God has sent to help you over this past few years, and what their gifts are.

For various reasons, you may not have seen this happen at your church. But this is not a reason for discouragement – this time has offered us an opportunity to look with new eyes at how we call, support and equip people for ministries.

A WAY FORWARD

We suggest that you conclude this session by filling in the document in Appendix 3 about your experiences and participation in the parish, and taking time to discuss what you find.

You can also offer this survey to parishioners and parish volunteers to find out how the parish can support their faith as disciples and in their ministries, and what formation might help them to grow more deeply in their faith.

It is hoped that you will begin to get an overview of parishioners' gifts, which ministries are healthy or in need of help, and how you can support individuals.

**'Ministry', in the sense used here, refers to the committed service of a lay person, exercised on behalf of the parish.*

'The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil one's mission.'

*- St John Paul II,
Christifidelis Laici 58*

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

FOR PRAYER

What intentions for prayer have come from this week's discussion? Make a note of them. Perhaps pray for them here or use them during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE VISION

S*pirit of God,*
descend on me this day.
Grant me the Spirit of joy, to lift me,
the Spirit of hope to inspire me,
the Spirit of love to surround me and
the Spirit of truth to enlighten my path.

Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
in love of you in my prayer
and in my actions towards others.

Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen



4 *OUR FOUR THEMES*

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, Creator of the world and author of all that is good, we seek your guidance and inspiration as a Diocesan family. Give us missionary zeal in the renewal of our parish communities.

May the gifts of your Holy Spirit be the source of all formation. May our closeness to your Son Jesus, in prayer, in Scripture and in the Sacraments make us convincing heralds of the Good News. Bless our homes, families and schools with knowledge of your constant and compassionate presence.

As you shape our lives from the moment of our baptism, keep before our eyes the needs of our neighbour, and encourage us to know that your Kingdom is promised first to those who know their need for you, the ones Whom your Son chooses and calls by name. We make our prayer through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayerfully read and reflect on the passage...

Close with a simple prayer, concluding with an invocation of diocesan or parish patron saints.

'...pray for us.'

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

- Luke 4: 17-19

DIOCESAN VISION STATEMENT

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The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

WORDS FROM ARCHBISHOP BERNARD
From the Diocesan Vision: *OUR FOUR THEMES...*



TO REFLECT ON

These four areas have been offered by the Archbishop in order to remind us of the key tasks of the Church, and he explains them for us. Further considerations he will add are *Young People & Families* and *Co-Responsibility*, as principles which should ground them. These themes are useful in helping us to assess the 'health' of our parish, as well as what ministries might be 'missing'.

Archbishop Bernard goes on to ask every Catholic to reflect on these four areas, to step outside our usual ways of thinking and to look with 'fresh eyes'. Consider and discuss the questions he raises:

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

"I ask you to reflect on these four areas - do you feel more strongly about one than another? Maybe God is calling you to use your talents there? I ask you to consider how you might put those gifts into action in service of the Church."

ACTIVITY

A good way that you can take this further is by using the framework in Appendix 4 which will help you to reflect on the 'health' of your parish in a systematic way. Are these themes present and represented in your parish and do they serve young people and families? Are there groups that can make them their responsibility or concern? Does anyone come to mind from Part 3 with gifts that might serve these areas?

"To prepare for this change, [...] there are four areas I am asking us all to focus on:

Evangelisation – *Encouraging others to know God's love for them by inviting them to church, to pray and to encounter Christ, and to groups where they can learn about Him. Forming missionary disciples and missionary parishes.*

Formation - *Growing leaders in our churches, schools and parish communities, by providing both spiritual and pastoral formation and support, to help prepare us for new roles. Helping you to understand more about your faith in order to deepen your personal relationship with God.*

Liturgy & Worship - *Invigorating and deepening our worship and sacramental celebrations so that we share in, and radiate, the divine life of God. Encouraging others to join us in prayer to our Heavenly Father.*

Social Outreach - *Building up the common good through our charitable outreach in the giving of our time, our resources and our love to those who need it most. Inviting others to join us in our charitable work."*

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

FOR PRAYER

What intentions for prayer have come from this week's discussion? Make a note of them. Perhaps pray for them here or use them during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE VISION

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Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
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Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen



5 *MY COMMITMENT*

OPENING PRAYER

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Amen

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Close with a simple prayer, concluding with an invocation of diocesan or parish patron saints.

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DIOCESAN VISION STATEMENT

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'Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.'

- Matthew 24: 45-47

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

WORDS FROM ARCHBISHOP BERNARD

From the Diocesan Vision: *MY COMMITMENT...*



TO REFLECT ON

These words demonstrate a commitment to nothing less than a change of culture in our Archdiocese. While we may have a fantastic vision, or even a developed strategy for how we might go forward, it is often the culture of our parish or place that stifles our plans before they even start. This is why communicating vision is one of the first steps we need to take, and why the Archbishop has laid one out clearly for us to aim for.

With vision as the start – and an indispensable part – of this culture change, there may be structures that get in the way of our mission. The Archbishop has identified the Deanery as one example of a structure that he sees changing to serve the Vision, and he wants to see ways for clergy and lay people to come together co-responsibly, as another. Making our concern for young people and families *explicit goals*, should transform the way our ministries serve people too.

As our priests serve more and more communities, it is likely that Leadership Groups or Pastoral Councils need to be considered more broadly across the Archdiocese, to support the four areas mentioned above. In any case, there will be need for leaders to carry forward this culture change.

Culture can be a positive thing too, of course, and it will be important to discern which aspects of our parish or diocesan culture encourage our mission.

“I will be taking my own actions:

- I will ensure that priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful are supported to work together in true partnership, being co-responsible, for the mission of the Church and deepening our relationship with God. Clergy and laity working side by side using their unique talents to create those vibrant and joyful communities.*

- I will put the structure of the Archdiocese at the service of our mission. This will begin with a reorganisation of our deaneries at the end of this year so they can begin to review how our parish structures can better support our mission and ensure that parishes are ‘fit for the future’ in all senses.*

- I will put young people and families at the centre of our diocesan planning. Working with and through our wonderful Catholic schools; we will listen to them and actively encourage and support them to use their talents in the life of the Church and build ever stronger relationships between our schools and parishes.”*

The Diocesan Vision: *UNFOLDING GOD'S PLAN*

ACTIVITY

To understand this idea of culture, read Appendix 5a – discuss what you read, what you agree/disagree with. Using Appendix 5b as a follow up, **make a list** of the 'cultures' that might need to change to encourage a missionary culture.

You can also revisit the 4 Areas document to see how we might exercise all of our ministries in, as Pope Francis urges us, 'a missionary key.' The following may be a useful image to describe what the Pope means – not necessarily that we do more, but to consider the way in which we do it.

'Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way"'

- Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 33



The Archbishop has called together four groups to advocate for the four themes identified in Part 4. The groups (*along with Young People & Families and Co-responsibility*) have been given the care of each area of the Vision, and more information about them can be found on the diocesan website Vision pages. Ask them how can they can support you!

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FOR PRAYER

What intentions for prayer have come from this week's discussion? Make a note of them. Perhaps pray for them here or use them during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE VISION

S*pirit of God,*
descend on me this day.
Grant me the Spirit of joy, to lift me,
the Spirit of hope to inspire me,
the Spirit of love to surround me and
the Spirit of truth to enlighten my path.

Holy Spirit,
I pray for a new outpouring of your grace,
so that I may grow in worship of your name
in love of you in my prayer
and in my actions towards others.

Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen



6 *MAKE A PLEDGE TO PRAY*

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, Creator of the world and author of all that is good, we seek your guidance and inspiration as a Diocesan family. Give us missionary zeal in the renewal of our parish communities.

May the gifts of your Holy Spirit be the source of all formation. May our closeness to your Son Jesus, in prayer, in Scripture and in the Sacraments make us convincing heralds of the Good News. Bless our homes, families and schools with knowledge of your constant and compassionate presence.

As you shape our lives from the moment of our baptism, keep before our eyes the needs of our neighbour, and encourage us to know that your Kingdom is promised first to those who know their need for you, the ones Whom your Son chooses and calls by name. We make our prayer through the same Christ our Lord.

Amen

Prayerfully read and reflect on the passage...

Close with a simple prayer, concluding with an invocation of diocesan or parish patron saints.

'...pray for us.'

'And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.'

- 1 John 5: 14-15

DIOCESAN VISION STATEMENT

Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

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WORDS FROM ARCHBISHOP BERNARD

Excerpt from the Diocesan Vision: *MAKE A PLEDGE TO PRAY...*



TO REFLECT ON

This is by far the most important thing every Catholic and every parish can do to make this vision a reality! The prayers for the Diocesan Vision can be useful for uniting a parish for this purpose, and we would encourage you to distribute them far and wide. Yet, while increasing prayer for the ministries God is calling us to is important, it is arguably just as important to deepen the quality of that prayer. To follow Jesus Christ as disciples means to know Him intimately through an ongoing conversion of heart, watered by a deepening life of prayer. Consider the following:

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- Can our parish make a 'pledge to pray' for the Vision?
- Can we establish prayer and Adoration for mission?
- Can we develop a catechesis of prayer to encourage those who struggle with this key part of Catholic life?
- How can we deepen the quality of our parish prayer?

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

Look back over the notes you have made over these sessions and decide what actions you would like to take and perhaps what ministries you have identified as needing support, under those themes. Can a group come together to begin to think about these things further (perhaps a leadership group or pastoral council, if you haven't got one), or can the group you've established to look into the Diocesan Vision become tasked with caring for your parish mission?

"I will be sharing more about these plans and the part we will all play in the coming months. You can also find out more by going to our website.

For now, in preparation, I will be praying about all that is before us as we step out on this pilgrimage of faith. I ask you to pray the vision prayer with me as we plan the way ahead, to strengthen your faith with a new action. We will be supporting parishes with more training, resources and events to help us all take more steps towards our mission to serve God and to grow our Church."

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Hopefully, by doing some of the activities in these sessions and answering the questions you now have a clearer idea of:

- how recent past events have affected your parish and parishioners, and what they might need in order to deepen or renew their discipleship of faith;
- how our Diocesan Vision has helped you to '*unfold God's Plan*', and whether the Vision is something which is understood and held by every Catholic;
- all those who volunteer or serve in your parish and how you encourage others, supporting them in their particular ministries into the future;
- the 'health' of your parish with regard to the 4 areas our Archbishop has identified;
- how our unseen culture can impede our mission, and what might need to change, in order for those things we desire to see flourish;
- how you might now go forward from a firmer foundation, and the things you need to establish, to become a '*vibrant community of faith, joyful in service of God and neighbour!*'

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The **Office for Mission** has been established to help support parishes in seeing the Diocesan Vision bear fruit. We have some new web pages and a blog to help with resources and ideas for evangelisation and formation. Please visit:

www.vocations.org.uk/office-for-mission

THANK YOU

We appreciate you taking the time to consider the Diocesan Vision in more depth. For more information, please visit: www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/vision

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FOR PRAYER

What intentions for prayer have come from this week's discussion? Make a note of them. Perhaps pray for them here or use them during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE VISION

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and in my actions towards others.

Come Holy Spirit into my life to guide me.
Strengthen and defend me,
so that I may be drawn ever closer to you.
Help me this day and always
to be a channel of grace
in all I say and do
and invite others into relationship with you.

Amen



*Notes &
Appendices*

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APPENDIX 1

LIVING OUR FAITH BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

It's been a challenging time for parishes over the past few years. In response to the Archbishop's invitation to 'reflect with him' as part of the Diocesan Vision, please think about your experiences and make some notes, which you might like to share with others, to assist your parish to discern the way forward. Some questions to help you write about your experiences may include:

Past:

- *Did the pandemic help/hinder your faith?*
- *What did you learn about your parish/community?*
- *Which ministries continued/started during the pandemic?*

Present

- *How does your parish help you to grow in your relationship with God and others? How might it encourage even more growth?*
- *How does your parish identify and use the gifts of its people? How do you participate in parish life?*

Future:

- *If you could describe your parish fulfilling its mission to spread the Good News (evangelise) and to Serve the community, what would it look like? Who is Jesus calling you to serve and reach out to today?*
- *What is your dream/hope for the future of your parish, and your role within it? What about fears?*

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To help identify the different experiences, tick any words that apply, or add your own.

Challenge Opportunity Growth Joy Increased Faith
Decreased Faith Renewal Suffering Beginning
Ending Fear Loneliness Community Isolation
Anger Consolation Desolation Hope Other _____

To write a more narrative record, use the space below. If you want to share some of these details more broadly, you might want to avoid identifying individuals, keeping your observations generic.

Write your reflection/thoughts/responses here:

If you would like to give a title to what you have written, please put that here:

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APPENDIX 2a

DIOCESAN VISION: QUESTIONS AND NOTES

“Our Vision is to be a Catholic diocese which is faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly in vibrant communities of faith, joyful in their service of God and neighbour.”

Please fill this section in BEFORE the session.

<p><i>What are your first impressions of this Vision statement?</i></p>	<p><i>What excites you most about it?</i></p>
<p><i>Is this your dream for your parish too?</i></p>	<p><i>What could be added? Is it reflective of your own parish vision statement (if you have one)?</i></p>

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APPENDIX 2b

Some prompts/definitions are offered in Appendix 2c if you need them.

i) *What does it mean to be a Catholic diocese?*

ii) *What is the mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to us/me?*

iii) *How can we/I be faithful to that mission?*

iv) *What is a missionary disciple? Am I a missionary disciple?*

v) *What is co-responsibility?*

vi) *Our parish/school/family is a “vibrant community of faith, joyful in our service of God and neighbour.” Discuss.*

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APPENDIX 2c

The following may help you to reflect on the questions in Appendix 2b

i) The **Archdiocese of Birmingham** “is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to [our Archbishop] for him to shepherd with the cooperation of [the priests] adhering to its pastor and gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is truly present and operative” (Can. 369)

ii) **Mission** doesn't necessarily mean being a missionary, but is about discovering our purpose and call. Perhaps Jesus' words may help us here:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' (Luke 4:17-19)

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:19-20)

iii & iv) “The first proclamation, the task of every Christian, is based on that ‘go’ (Mark 16:15; Matt 28:19) which Jesus gave as an instruction to his disciples and which implies going out, making haste, accompanying, thus becoming **true missionary disciples**.” (Directory for Catechesis 69)

If we follow Christ, we WILL be missionary! ‘Missionary’ denotes that we are both *called* and *sent*. So the straightforward question is, ‘am I a disciple of Jesus Christ – following him and learning from him?’

v) **Co-responsibility** recognises that each of us has a mission which is complementary, not in competition, with another's, and which God asks us to exercise in the Body (1 Corinthians 12: 12-27). Co-responsibility is not optional, but is necessary for the mission of the Church.

vi) Discussion. (The activity in Part 4 will also help us to think about this further.)

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APPENDIX 3

PARISH FEEDBACK FORM

Over the past few years our parish has faced many challenges, not least closed churches and subsequent social distancing at mass. Access to the sacraments was difficult and relationships in the parish may have been affected, with some choosing to change how they participated in parish life.

Due to the generosity of many, our parish has been able to continue to offer support to those who would otherwise have been left out or been alone. We are grateful for the roles people have taken on, or indeed continued, and we would like to ensure that you remain equipped for these ministries, as well as offering ongoing resources for your spiritual well-being and growth in faith.

Therefore, we'd like to take this opportunity to ask you to complete the attached form and return it to us. Your responses will help us step into the future with more confidence, and to support you to live out your Catholic faith in the places where you live, work and worship.

Name:

Contact number & email:

Please indicate your current ministry/ministries:

Ministry (eg welcomer, reader, SVP etc)	Started since pandemic? ✓

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We believe it is important that volunteers/ministers in our parish are commissioned and supported in their work. We've suggested some ways that we'd like to do that. Please indicate which of the following might help you:

Please indicate any that apply...	Tick ✓
Further formation, reading or creative ideas for your area of ministry	
Further formation on your Catholic faith	
Talks on the Catholic faith at Church or online	
Prayer Groups/Bible Studies/Home groups	
Video Courses or Discussion groups	
Academic study in the faith	
Opportunities for service at Church or in the community...	
- eg SVP, Legion of Mary, Parish Catechesis, Reader, Server, Choir etc	
Regular contact/support from a member of the parish	
Someone to talk to about your vocation or challenges of being Catholic	
Formation to grow as a leader at church or in your area of ministry	
RCIA or other instruction on the sacraments or becoming a Catholic	
Other...	

Can you tell us about other ways you think we can support your faith?

Are there any ways we can improve communications here? Do you know what is going on in the parish and are you aware of useful contacts/support?

Which other groups would you like to see have opportunities to deepen their faith and grow as Catholic disciples? What would benefit them?

Thank you for filling in this survey!

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APPENDIX 4 (For definitions of the 4 areas see PART 4)

DIOCESAN VISION – OUR PARISH

Identify the various ministries in your parish (as well as those that you would like to exist) that fit into the 4 elements of our diocesan vision. Consider how **Young People & Families** are catered for in each area, and how ministries can be exercised **Co-Responsibly**. Is anything missing?

EVANGELISATION	FORMATION
LITURGY/WORSHIP (PRAYER)	SOCIAL OUTREACH

APPENDIX 5a

HOW YOUR CULTURE EATS YOUR STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST

By Hannah Vaughan-Spruce (www.transformedinchrist.com)

You've heard the famous Peter Drucker phrase, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." When I came across this quotation, I felt that it couldn't apply more to Catholic parishes. Here's what I mean.

So many parishes are slowly waking up to the need to evangelise. Events like Nightfever have captured people's imagination and are taking place in inner city churches up and down the country. The number of parishes hosting courses like Alpha has sky-rocketed, so I'm told. The popularity of parish evangelisation teams is rising, which suggests that outreach initiatives must be becoming the norm in some parishes.

It all suggests that parishes are actually doing evangelisation, which – well, it's the Great Commission, so it's amazing. It is our mission and our deepest identity. That is until you realise, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

Culture is so powerful because it is invisible, unconscious and pervasive. It conditions the way we interact, behave and view situations and people. It is manifested in physical space and artefacts as much as in relationships and assumptions. We can't see it because we are part of it, and it is part of us.

When you enter a cluttered entrance to a church without any obvious indications of what to do or where to go, that is culture. When you walk into a church hall and people look up to see who has walked in but no one comes to greet you, that is culture. When people in the parish predominantly see their church attendance as part of their ethnic or cultural heritage, that is culture. When you arrive at Mass to find the majority of people sitting at the back of the church or at the end of a pew, that's culture. When you encounter people whose attitude is that the Church should be there primarily to serve their needs, whether a sacrament or a visit from a priest, that is culture. Weekly bulletins that use insider language and acronyms that mean something only to the initiated – yep, it's culture. A mindset that events organised by the church are for the retired only or those with nothing else to do – that's culture too. And when you would never consider bringing a non-Christian friend to your parish... you've got it... it's culture.

All of these examples, of course, are of anti-evangelisation culture. I think that, the more we keep evangelising – both individually and corporately in our

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parishes – our parish cultures will change. But not if our cultures don't defeat our evangelisation strategy first.

Occasionally I hear of a parish that runs Alpha maybe two or three times. After this, the numbers begin to dwindle, and then before they know it, they are running an Alpha course for maybe ten Catholic parishioners. After this, they give up. People will always say now, "Oh, we tried that and it didn't work." I would hazard a guess and say that the anti-evangelisation culture of the parish defeated the attempts to evangelise.

Or maybe you gathered a group with a great enthusiasm to organise extra hospitality at Christmas Masses. You pray for the extra people who will come, greet them at the door, give them a flier to take away with events happening in the new year. But extra people mean fewer car parking spots and places to sit. The pushback from other parishioners and lack of support from the priest is such that your team gets discouraged and loses their enthusiasm to do it the following year.

It is a perfect example of your culture defeating your strategy. Your team's evangelising subculture couldn't survive the wider anti-evangelising parish culture. It is like putting a freshwater fish into salt water. The environment is uninhabitable and it won't survive.

Strategising the Anti-Evangelisation out of your Culture!

- ***It starts with leadership.*** *I'm sorry, but it does. Unless your parish priest is leading the way, from my experience, culture is unlikely to change. Homilies are powerful, culture-carrying vehicles. They communicate whether the parish is about under-taking, care-taking, or risk-taking. So much flows from here.*
- ***Transformation happens through the power of the Holy Spirit.*** *It is the Holy Spirit who gives life back to the dry bones. No real and lasting change will happen without reliance on the Holy Spirit.*
- ***Small changes alter the tone.*** *It is amazing the impact of numerous small changes. Greeting people outside the church. An abundant approach to hospitality. Exploiting every opportunity to share personal testimony until it becomes the norm. Offering opportunities for people explicitly to take a step of faith – until this too feels 'normal'.*
- ***Be strategic.*** *Just because culture can swallow up your strategy doesn't mean you shouldn't have one. In fact you absolutely should. I would go far as to say, strategise the anti-evangelisation out of your culture! Having a strategy basically means planning how you are going to get where you want to be, with the resources you have. And so your strategy should be explicit about how you want your culture to change too.*

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APPENDIX 5b

Consider the culture and cultures of your parish and/or community. Do they support or hinder your evangelisation in the following areas, and how might they need to change? Perhaps you can think of others too...

Parish Welcome (in person or online)

To know and to be known (at church or online)

Deepening prayer and faith

Finding out about, and joining, groups

Invitation

Formation and training

Other: