

The Bishop of Carlisle

The Right Reverend James Newcome
Bishop's House, Ambleside Road,
Keswick CA12 4DD

Bishop's letter to parishes – to be available on 19th October 2014

Growing Disciples

It is nearly four years since we published the “Green Book” setting out our mission and our vision for the next ten years. Over that time we have been working out what we need to do to fulfil our mission and make the vision a reality.

This has translated into three linked strategies – Mission and Outreach, Ministry, and Buildings – and we have developed an underlying commitment to doing this with our sister churches.

On Saturday 11th October our Diocesan Synod agreed two important steps. One is that our budget, for the first time planned for five years ahead, is shaped round what we are going to do. We continue to resource parochial ministry hugely – which is the heart of the Ministry Strategy. But we are also going to spend money on Mission and Outreach. Bishop Robert describes

- MeReach (what each of us can do to draw ourselves and others into closer faithfulness and discipleship),
- InReach (welcoming those who come to us and inviting those with some links to church),
- Outreach and BigReach (using both more traditional and innovative means to reach out to the perhaps half a million people living in Cumbria, and our thirteen million tourists, who have almost no contact with church).

Synod also agreed a second step - that we are going to shape ministry round Mission Communities. These will be more than simple federations of churches – they must be communities of churches, with all that this means for mutual support. And they will have mission in their DNA – they must remember that Church is not a club, but has been called into being by God to look outwards to the whole of his creation, to help make his Kingdom a reality. The rough shapes of Mission Communities are emerging across the county – we think there will be about forty of them. They will each be different and will go at different speeds – and that range of possibilities is, from my perspective, exciting. They will all provide mutual support, encouragement and challenge in prayer and a shared commitment to growing disciples.

This second step has been the subject of much discussion over the past year. It is a big change and so of course there has been and is uncertainty, which causes anxiety. We are very grateful to the Ministry Strategy Feedback and Advisory Group which has handled much of this. Now we have had the Synod vote, we want the nascent Mission Communities to continue their local conversations with determination. There is an element of urgency here, and of reality too. We do face financial pressures and there is also a shortage of stipendiary clergy. But this is not a strategy to manage decline, it is a way of becoming a more effective and faithful, sustainable and growing church.

These two key decisions affirm our understanding that **God is for all** (the Mission and Outreach strategy) and **Church is by all** (the Ministry strategy). So each of us – from congregation members in each Church to me as Bishop – will need to change the way we work as Church members. God has called us to his service and he will give us the gifts we need to fulfil our task as it changes. Of course, managing change is an art and a skill, and we are thinking and working hard at this. But it is God's call to grow disciples, and we regard all this as part of our faithful and obedient response.

With best wishes.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed text "Yours in Christ".