

Extraordinary Diocesan Conference 06/07/24

Pruning for Growth – Introduction by Archdeacon Paul Mackness

First of all, thank you for your patience in waiting for the launch of our new Diocesan Strategy and also for your presence here this morning in so large numbers. I think the importance of today is mirrored by the number of you who have opted to attend as well as others who have asked to attend.

What is Pruning for Growth?

As Archdeacon Mones has already demonstrated this strategy has its origins in scripture and the teachings of the Church.

Pruning for Growth, is quite simply a strategy to reorientate the Diocese towards growth and away from decline. It is a process to ensure that we are looking in depth at every LMA and individual church to be able to compare them to every other LMA and church and see which churches are more focused towards growth and which are sadly in decline.

It is not a blunt tool it is a process that is based upon the use of hard facts measured and tempered by individual conversations and discussions. It is also something that isn't going to happen overnight and then us forget about it – it will take time, if we are to do this correctly, fairly and accurately.

Why are we doing this?

Now, I know that there are some here who will be scared about what I am about to introduce to you – the unknown and change are always a little disturbing and make us uncomfortable. I am also aware that some people have been briefing congregations negatively about this, without actually knowing the details of the Strategy or indeed any basis in fact or truth. We are recording all of these sessions with the view to uploading them to the Diocesan Website within a week of this Conference, so that people can go back to refresh themselves on what was said and that those who are not here with us this

morning can also hear the same information that you are by physically being in the room.

Pruning for Growth has been germinating in the minds of the Bishop's Staff, DBF and Standing Committee for a number of years. What I am presenting to you all this morning is the fruits of many discussions and concerns and plans that

have been suggested by numerous individuals and Committees as well as church members – given form and structure as a coherent and holistic strategy.

It has been approved by the Bishop, Senior Staff, Standing Committee and DBF as the way forward. To put this matter bluntly – and you wouldn't expect anything else from me – something has to change, because doing more of the same is not an option! We are living in a time where church attendance and commitment is in decline, the numbers of clergy, both stipendiary and non-stipendiary is also declining, our resources as churches, LMAs and the Diocese as a whole are also being stretched to the limits or are no longer there. Clergy and laity are telling us that they are overworked and have little or no spare capacity. Something has to give or there will be monumental collapse in our Diocese.

Let's also look at some facts – LMAs are here to stay – whether you like them or hate them, they will be remaining – it is the direction that the whole of the Church in Wales is going. We have two options, make them work or commit spiritual and institutional suicide by sabotaging them. I will be honest – they are not perfect, nor are they necessarily the best way to deliver mission and ministry, but neither are they the hinderance that some people are making them out to be. Clergy and laity who are engaging positively are creating LMAs that are flourishing and are doing positive things for the Gospel. Where the opposite is happening - they are failing and this is primarily due to the negativity and unwillingness of people to attempt to make them work. *Pruning for Growth* will aim to address this.

This Diocese currently possesses around about a quarter of the 1200 odd church buildings in the Church in Wales – but not a quarter of the clergy or resources. Many of these building require a lot of work on their fabric. Although we get 25% of the money that is given from the RB towards Church Repairs Grants – these grants for up to £7500, that can be claimed every three years – are not enough to deal with the costs that we are facing. Some of these buildings are over national and international significance and some of them are not. Some are Victorian buildings which are coming to the end of their natural life in regards to the fabric – they were monuments to Victorian vanity, rather than anything else. However, our church buildings are very dear and hold emotional attachments to many of us, due to long connections through families with baptisms, marriages and funeral, not to mention loved ones and ancestors buried

in churchyards. Pruning for Growth is not all about closing Church buildings – despite what some might have said. But any building that is held to be more important than the mission and ministry of the Gospel has become an item of idolatry. Equally it is not about keeping buildings open either. It is about using our buildings as tools for mission.

We need to go back to basic gospel principles...the purpose of the Church is to bring people to God, to proclaim the good news of the Gospel and to create new disciples and Christians through acts of Christian love and the sacrament of Baptism. Our focus needs to be looking to bring more into the Kingdom of God and sharing our faith and making Christ known in the world. We believe that *Pruning for Growth* will help us to do this and help the Diocese to refocus.

How will this be done?

As I have said this is a process – this means that we will do this methodically, prayerfully and responsibly. There will in effect be four stages.

1. The first stage is scoring all churches on a fact-based matrix in order to get an up to date and accurate snapshot of the state of our churches and congregations. Each church will be rated as to whether it is dying, declining, growing or flourishing.
2. The second stage is holding conversations with every church and LMA about the details behind the facts and the snapshots and the rating that is given.
3. The third stage will be the creation of recommendations to each LMA in relation to the first and second stages and asking for their feedback, suggestions and ideas. We will be dealing with each church as part of the wider LMA in which they sit.
4. The fourth stage will be taking firm recommendations to the Bishop, Senior Staff, DBF Standing Committee and Churches and Pastoral Committee in relation to each church and LMA for implementation.

The important thing to remember in this process is that there will be no one size fits all model but that all of the recommendations will be based upon fact, conversations and discussions. Ultimately those with legal responsibility for the running of the Diocese – Primarily the Bishop and Standing Committee will make decisions. Hopefully these will be ones that have been mutually agreed by all interested parties, but if agreement cannot be made decisions will be taken. We are not making any assumptions, but we hope that whatever the

recommendations are, they will reorientate us to be a leaner, more mission and growth focused Diocese. Afterall that is the reason for the strategy!

Who will be running this?

There are numerous bodies which have different responsibilities within the Diocese and different decisions will need to be taken by the relevant bodies. These are church committees, LMA Councils, the Diocesan Board of Finance, the Standing Committee, the Diocesan Conference, the Churches and Pastoral Committee, the Bishop's Staff, the Senior Staff and the Bishop. In light of the large number of bodies and people involved. The Bishop, Senior Staff, DBF and Standing Committee have agreed that there will need to be a single committee to coordinate this process – this group will be known as the Gardening Group.

The Gardening Group

The Gardening Group is made up of representatives from these Commissioning Bodies.

The Bishop has asked me to Chair the Gardening Group. My fellow Archdeacons also serve on the Gardening Group and the Archdeacon of Carmarthen has been elected as the Deputy Chair.

The Chair of the DBF, Mrs Hazel Evans has been appointed to the committee and the DBF have elected the Revd Steven Brett and Professor Andrew Henley to represent them.

The Vice Chair of the Standing Committee, Mr Tim Llewelyn has been appointed to the Gardening Group and the Revd Neil Hook and Mrs Sue Henley have been elected to represent the Standing Committee

The Bishop has appointed the Revd Sophie Whitmarsh, the Children Youth and Families Missioner and Professor Medwin Hughes, the Chair of the Representative Body as his nominees.

The Gardening Group has co-opted the Revd Jeff Thomas, the former Stewardship and Support Officer to the group and there is currently one place for a lay co-option being kept open.

The Diocesan Secretary Mr Howard Llewellyn, Finance Manager, Mrs Nia Evans and Admin and Property Manager, Miss Emma O'Connor attend meetings of the

Gardening Group. Mrs Janet Every, our Care of Churches Officer provides administrative support.

I am very grateful to all of the members for agreeing to serve and who have already begun work to help deliver the strategy and plan this Conference and will help deliver the presentations for today's meeting. The Gardening Group has already met three times and has identified a number of workstreams.

It will be members of the Gardening Group who will work with churches and LMAs to deliver the various stages of this process.

The Pruning for Growth Matrix

Now, you have heard me mention the *Pruning for Growth Matrix* – following this presentation, Mrs Hazel Evans and Mr Tim Llewelyn will explain more about the Matrix and what questions are being asked and what the process for completing this will be.

Following this, members of the Gardening Group will given some pen portraits of examples of churches from different parts of the Matrix to give you an idea of what sort of qualities determine where a church will sit on the Matrix.

Stage Two – Conversations and drilling down

The Archdeacon of Carmarthen will explain how we currently envision Stage Two to work following the scoring of churches across the Matrix.

Before I turn over to my colleagues I want to say three more things

Time Scale

We hope to complete the Matrix scoring for all churches, working with the Gardening Group, LMA Deans, relevant church officials and other LMA clergy by the end of 2024. An update on progress will be given at the October Diocesan Conference.

We hope then to begin the second stage which will take as long as it takes if we are to do this well and to allow churches and LMAs to make their contributions. Whilst there is no firm timeline I would hope that this stage would be completed by the 2025 Conference.

Ministry Share Formula Revision

It has been agreed that one of the work streams that will be assigned to the Gardening Group is to look at the Ministry Share Formula for an implementation of an agreed formula for use in 2025. It is recognised that the last revision of the formula was done as we came out of the pandemic and was based upon the assumption that everything would return to as it had been before COVID. We recognise that this was in hindsight wrong, hence the desire to revise again. The ultimate decision on the final share will be with the DBF, but we will consult more widely as we try to fortunate a new way of calculating the Ministry Share. If people have ideas for how this might be done, please send them to me for discussion and modelling.

Finally, I strongly encourage you all to engage with the strategy positively and constructively. We all want the best for the Church and the Diocese we all want to serve Christ to the best of our abilities. But...if you do not engage with it, it will be done to you rather than with you, and I don't believe that any of us wants that. We want healthy, honest and constructive discussions and conversations, we are one Church, one Diocese, one Family.

Thank you.