

Visions of Ministry: St Edward's

This large evangelical congregation was looking to re-order its building and extend.

The re-ordering would cost in the region of £1.7 million.

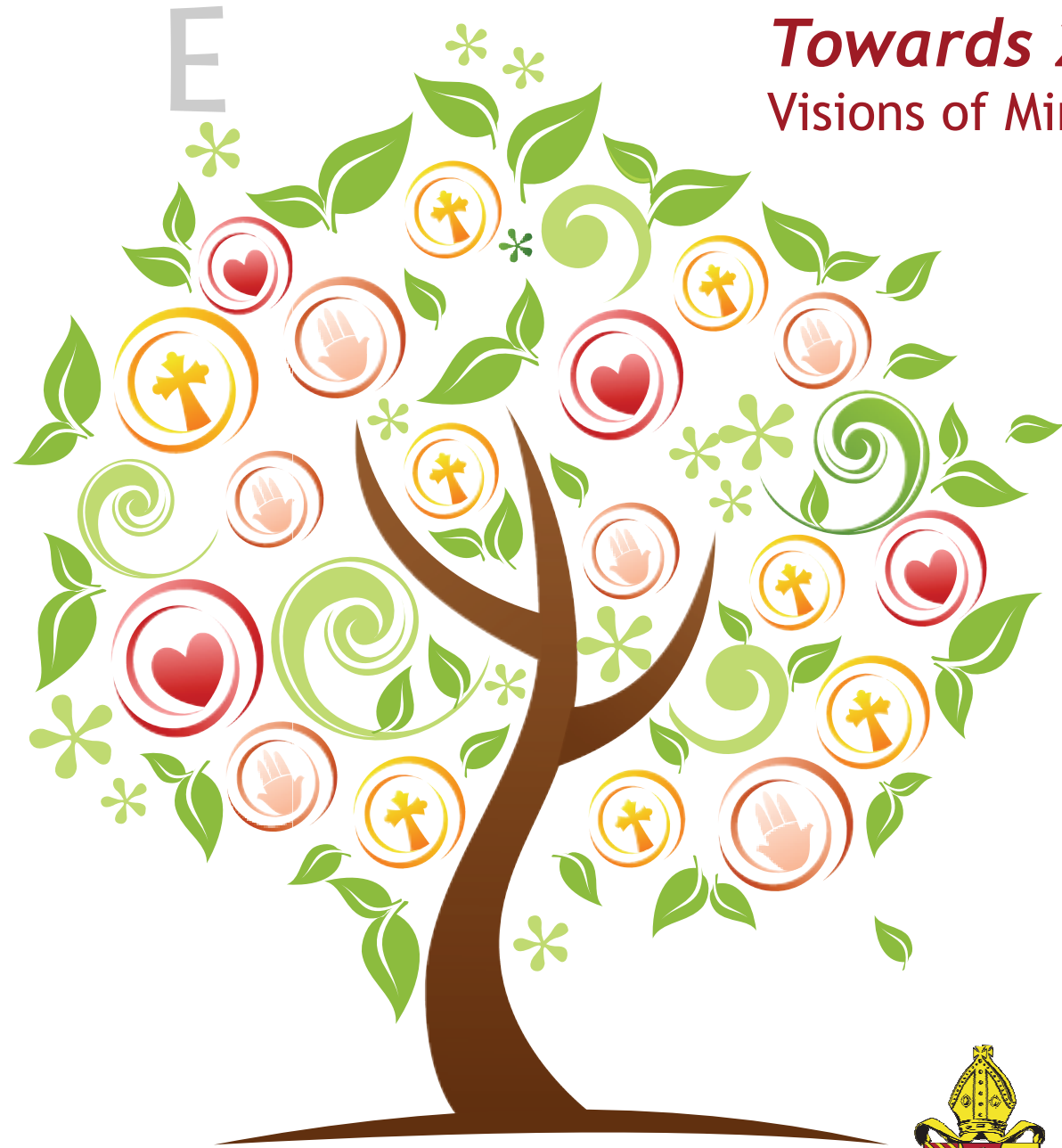
A member of the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee had suggested rather facetiously that there must be a church building and hall they could use and develop for much less money. Remarkably the idea “grew legs” and after much conversation and discussion and a Parish Away Day, St Edward's has made plans to move to St Stephen's – to share with them and to develop the links with the school over the road from St Stephen's.

The two parishes – by sharing – enable a range of services to be offered including a more traditional service which some of the older members at St Edward's have missed.

The two Readers at St Stephen's have rather different feelings. One feels a bit swamped, though he does take Morning Prayer regularly, while the other has become part of the Pastoral Team and helps with four or five funerals a month.

Some of the St Stephen's congregation also feel they have been rather “taken over”, though others are thrilled the church is now so much more active. As a result a much more modest re-ordering of St Edward's has been managed along with work done at St Stephen's.

Towards 2025: Visions of Ministry



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Visions of Ministry: St Dunstan's

The stories of the Old Testament tell us something of God's dealings with His people and His faithfulness to them through times of change. In the New Testament, Jesus called His disciples to be people who could read the signs of the times and make sense of them.

We are charged with handing on the gospel, or as St Paul puts it, with planting seeds knowing that others will reap in due season. (*1 Cor 3:6 - 9*)

As people charged with leadership in our parishes and diocese - PCC members, wardens, clergy and other ministers and bishops - we must be planting wisely and trusting others to reap in the future. If we have not planted they cannot reap! The crucial question is how are we planning for our churches and congregations to continue to be viable and to flourish in the coming years.

In this booklet you will find stories of how five churches have continued to share the gospel through changing times. They are all fictitious, but they may well be quite like the stories some of our parishes might tell if they look back 20 years from now.

I invite you to use these stories to start conversations in your churches, and to generate possibilities which, under God, will shape the future ministries of the church. For some people this is daunting, for others exciting and for others maybe still not exciting enough!

How do we feel about what God is doing in us, for us and through us at this time?

"The one who calls you is faithful .." (*1 Thess 5: 17*)

+ *Nigel Manchester*

Built in the 1930s with a very distinctive architecture in an otherwise unremarkable suburb, St Dunstan's is a Resolution AB and C parish.

It is the only one in this part of the diocese and although the Electoral Roll and attendance are both strong, the deanery plan only allowed for 0.5 of a stipendiary – in a parish which traditionally had vicar and curate.

Five miles away in the neighbouring diocese there was a similarly “isolated” Resolution C parish.

Both now share a priest but St Dunstan's has two people at different stages of exploring OLM.

An active Ministry Team has formed, at first with a predominantly pastoral focus, but more recently has made good links with the school and is developing a ministry in the school and after-school.

There are discussions now about whether and how the OLM about to be ordained might also be licensed in the other church in a diocese which does not have OLM!

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Also based at St Columba's is a Mission Support Priest who is establishing a town centre ministry and using the grandeur of the building to offer spiritual space mid-week. Part of her brief is also to work with the Young Adults Network in the Archdeaconry which meet every fortnight on a Sunday Evening. Once a month this overlaps with Sung Evensong, a service which is for all the deanery.

There are plans for the West End of the church to be converted to a narthex and for the church to be made more accessible for choirs and concerts. However there are no obvious funds as yet.

It is hoped that St Columba's will be part of the Mission Partnership with the other three churches, though it is not clear how ordained oversight will continue when the NSM retires and the Mission Support Priest post is reviewed.



St Columba's is the large town centre church, and has always been seen as the town centre church, both by its congregation and by the town.

It has always had a vicar of its own, and a strong choral tradition although this has been more difficult to maintain in the last few years. Next door parishes include St Peter's, St Mary's and All Saints.

Generally the area is one which is "past its best", with shops and population coming and going, mills going and various initiatives being tried and not seeming to work too well. The road system now is very different from when the churches were built, and two of the Church Schools are 99% Muslim in their intake.

The Deanery Plan never quite knew what to do with the four parishes, and for some of the congregation it felt as if the larger congregations elsewhere in the deanery always did better.

The Deanery Plan allowed for 1.5 stipendiaries for the four parishes or 2 at a push. St Columba's was sure one should be the vicar of St Columba's. What has turned out is that the other three parishes share the 2 stipendiaries while they work on a Mission Plan; in essence, either they grow to viable sized congregations or they look to merge congregations and close at least one of the buildings.

They have agreed with the Archdeacon to give this four years, which will require of them that they develop local vocations and increase the giving of the congregations as well to meet basic needs. It is expected that these three churches after this will have found a sustainable way to continue with a single stipendiary minister between them, though how this will be depends on the fruit of the Mission Plan.

St Columba's is served by an NSM and a recently retired priest is also providing liturgical and pastoral support, who provide a regular Sunday morning ministry.

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Suggested ways for ministers and parishes to engage with these sketches:

As you read through these scenarios (which are brief and probably invite all sorts of further questions):

- what strikes you as being the key qualities and issues which either might help churches cope with changing patterns and structures or not?
- Do these scenarios offer hope and flexibility?
- What otherwise might have been the future for these different churches?

In each there has been, in different ways, a re-ordering of the church's presence in building, ministry focus and personnel.

In each there has been an ongoing congregation and new people joining whose hopes and needs have or have not been met.

In each the workload for the key church officers and ministers has been hard and has changed in its requirements.

Put yourself in the position of Treasurer, Warden, Established Reader etc, and evaluate the changes you have faced in this sketch, and the probable joys, challenges and losses incurred.

Common to all is a commitment and embracing of a wider Ministry Team in the parish, a flexibility of where / when worship should happen, and a linking with other local churches: Are these things which can happen in your own situations?

Visions of Ministry: St Alban's



St Alban's used to be part of a Team Ministry – a United Benefice of 4 parishes.

In recent years the Team was dissolved and a mission partnership of 6 parishes has formed, served by 2 stipendiary ministers and with 5 OLMs either ordained or about to be ordained, and 3 Readers.

Within the Mission Partnership there are smaller groupings that flourish and work, and in different ways different parishes connect for different services or projects.

New initiatives like the After-School service on a Thursday are led by people from a couple of the parishes, other work like baptism preparation is led by a team from all six parishes.

Skilled leadership and generosity from key lay people in being willing to share has created a network of supports which is generating and encouraging new ministries without being too tied down in Committees etc.

St Alban's quinquennial raises serious questions about its viability as a building.

The congregation are obviously concerned but there is a realism about the implications as well as a confidence in the ongoing presence of both "church" and ministry in the area, which has been gained through the sense of being part of the shared Partnership.

Visions of Ministry: St Botolph's

It was a painful decision to end worship in St Botolph' after 120 years.

Not all the congregation agreed with the decision, and some felt hurt that the diocese had not done more first to help maintain the building and second to appoint a new vicar to the parish, which as they pointed out had 7000 people living in it.

There was a faithful congregation of 27 when the decision was taken – who between them had been worshipping there for 632 years. For a couple of years the building stood empty and somewhat desolate before it was agreed to pull it down and for the land to be used for a new Health Centre.

St Botolph' however continues as a worshipping congregation. It meets in the local Church School on a Sunday late afternoon, and a second congregation meets in term-time on a Wednesday afternoon after school. The Sunday congregation is a mixture of some of the old congregation and several new people.

The ministry team for both congregations is made up of a Reader (a teacher at the school), an NSM from St Michael's; the neighbouring parish, with which St Botolph' is now joined, three mums from the school, and one of the original congregation who has discovered a new Prayer Ministry. Sunday services alternate between a Eucharist and a sort of early-Evening Service.

Some of the original congregation now go to St Michael's and some to the monthly service in the Sheltered Housing where two live. It is in St John's parish, and the OLM at St John's leads a small team which ministers to the area's older people.

Because the three parishes are in a mission partnership these different ministries can all flourish. St Botolph' members would prefer to have their own church, and particularly when there is a funeral of a church member, but as the relationships grow with St Michael's and St John's so the fact that the services are in either of these two buildings is less strange. The School is also a registered place of worship and baptisms are beginning to happen there now.