

Theological Resources to help engage with the Transformation Fund

Our Mission: The Diocese of Lincoln is called by God to faithful worship, confident discipleship and joyful service.

Our Vision: To be a healthy, vibrant and sustainable Church transforming lives in Greater Lincolnshire.

Key question:

How does our proposed project reflect and engage with the theological principles outlined in this document?

1. The Missio Dei

The Bible teaches that mission is not primarily an activity of the Church, but rather lies at the very heart of the Trinitarian God. ‘*Missio Dei*’ is the Latin, which is translated to ‘the mission of God’ or the ‘sending of God’. The whole language of ‘sending’ and ‘being sent’ is fundamental to our understanding of the New Testament, especially John’s Gospel: God sends his Son; the Father and Son send the Spirit; and Father, Son and Spirit send the Church to fulfil God’s plan of salvation for the world He loves (see, for example, John 3:17, 14:26, 15:26, 20:21).

Our mission, then, stems from, and reflects, the very nature of God. It has been described as “finding out what God is doing and joining in”, and this is the call for every individual, church and mission community.

The mission of God has not been made for the Church but the Church has been made to live out God’s mission; the work of the Church is part of God’s work. This is God’s plan for the Church and indeed the world.



In 1984 the Anglican Consultative Council devised the ‘Five Marks of Mission’ to help define the foci of mission:

- our calling is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- to teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- to respond to human need by loving service
- to seek to transform unjust structures of society
- to strive to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

2. The Great Command and the Great Commission

As the Church seeks to live out the *Missio Dei* in its particular time, it is guided by both the Great Command and Great Commission of Jesus.

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The Church is called to love. The greatest commandment, Jesus tells us, is to love God with our whole being. We express this through our worship of God and how we live as one of His disciples. In Colossians 3:23, Paul reminds the Church that whatever they do they need to work at it with all their heart as working for the Lord and not people. Everything that we do should be for the honour and glory of God.

This leads to the second part of this passage: ‘to love our neighbour as ourselves’. This is our call to serve others through pastoral care and the mission of God. In addition, the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28 emphasises the Church being sent:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.”

This is the privilege that the Church has to live out in every age; links in an unbroken chain going back to the apostles, of those sent out in love into all the world to make new disciples.

3. Faithful Worship

The Christian faith is not new; it has existed in many of the world’s societies and among most of the world’s peoples for centuries, in which time it has taken on many differing forms and expressions of belief in the teaching, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. To be a Christian in Greater Lincolnshire, as to be a Christian anywhere, is to acknowledge our place within the fellowship of the

Church of God; what the Letter to the Hebrews describes as “a great cloud of witnesses”. We share our faith with the saints of past times and we share with them the fellowship of those who are called to be disciples of Jesus. Like them, we re-present the faith we received in our own time to those among whom we live; like them, we live out the charge “to proclaim the gospel afresh” in a way that enables others to connect with the living God, with each other, and with the world we are called to serve.

Worship is an essential part of that process. It is not simply something we do for ourselves, because we have become used to the forms we have grown up with, or we like the words and music of the liturgy. We worship because to do so is to re-present the narrative of God’s saving acts in history, to allow ourselves to be transformed by that, and to express our belief that the hope of new life in a world conformed to the purposes of God is our hope.

4. Confident Discipleship

Christianity looks outwards from the Church towards the world because Christians believe that God is concerned about the life of the world and is active in it. At the heart of Jesus’ message is the simple call issued to the first disciples to “follow me”. Christian discipleship, then, is that basic commitment to try and base our lives on the example and teaching of Jesus. It is something we do both individually and corporately with others who are also trying to live the ‘Jesus way’. It is something we do confidently because we know who it is that we are trying to follow, and because we are confident that his way conforms to the simple truths of how this world simply is.

Discipleship is a process involving a commitment to ‘a way of being’ sustained by the basic spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, worship, prayer, and meeting with other followers of Jesus, and ‘a way of living’ that is outward facing, seeking to love and serve the world.

5. Joyful Service

Christianity, because it is based on the teaching of Jesus, necessarily involves being concerned about the lives of others. Jesus reiterated the ancient teaching of Israel that to love God must involve us in caring about those around us, including those wholly different from us and even those who do not care about us at all. The teaching of the Israelite prophets emphasised that no society could be thought to be godly or righteous that neglected the welfare of its weakest and most vulnerable; or which marginalised or rejected the stranger, the refugee or those ‘passing through’ to find a life elsewhere.

Joyful service of others arises out of our sense of hope, even if that hope can seem remote and hard to envisage, let alone achieve. It is a hope based in Jesus’ coming among us to share our human nature in his incarnation and the

new life to which his resurrection bears witness; that love is stronger than hate, that goodness is more durable than evil, that the light of God shines in the world and the darkness can neither understand nor overcome it.

Joyful service, then, either individually or when we work together as Church, enables us to participate in the purposes of God in making this world a little bit more like the world it is intended to be. It enables us to be part of the answer to our own prayer of ‘Your kingdom come, Your will be done, here on earth as it is in heaven’. It does not have to be a big or great action. In the words of Mother Teresa, it is a case of living out that “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

6. **Transformation** (Diocese of Birmingham’s “Transforming Church”)

The New Testament has two related words for transformation: ‘morphoo’ (from which we derive our English word ‘morph’), and ‘metamorphoo’ (from which we derive our word ‘metamorphosis’). *Morphoo* is used in Galatians 4:19, where Paul speaks of Christ being ‘formed’ in us; *metamorphoo* is used in Romans 12:2, where he speaks of being ‘transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you can discern what is the will of God’.

God’s transforming work begins in Christian individuals, as Christ is formed in his people (Galatians 4:19; 2 Corinthians 3:18); but transformed lives also have a transforming effect in the Church and in the world around them. Having instructed his readers to be ‘transformed by the renewing of your minds’, Paul goes on to picture what that transformation looks like in the Church, speaking of love, generosity, perseverance and a Christ-like attitude to both stranger and persecutor (Romans 12:3–21).

Paul is clear that God is the one who does the transforming. We don’t transform ourselves but transformation is “from the Lord who is the Spirit”

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.”
(2 Corinthians 3:17–18).

We have a part to play in this transformation. We need to be open to the transformation and put ourselves into the right position. Moses was willing to walk up the mountain and put himself in the right position, allowing God to transform him. Moses glowed when he was in the presence of God, but then would wear a veil as the glow faded, as he moved down the mountain, away from God’s presence.

7. **Growth** (Diocese of Birmingham's 'Transforming Church')

The numerical growth of the early Church is well-charted by Luke, who rapidly moves from 12 to 70 to 120 to 3000 to 5000, before losing count! Numbers are important, because they represent individuals who have responded to the call of the Kingdom (the 'fortyfold, sixtyfold, hundredfold' increase in the parable of the sower); but the letters to the churches in the book of Revelation also remind us that size isn't everything: as the Risen Christ says to the church in Smyrna, "I know your afflictions and poverty – yet you are rich!" (Revelation 2:9).

We should not underestimate the challenge of growing churches in today's climate (especially in some of our tougher communities), but nor should we give way to a self-fulfilling fatalism. Provided we plant and water carefully and prayerfully, there can be an expectation that God will bring the growth, however fragile that growth can sometimes appear (1 Corinthians 3:6). God gave the growth at Pentecost and in Acts 2:47.

8. **Church Growth** ('The Church of England: Mission, Presence and Growth')

God gives His Church gifts to undertake His mission. It is God who grows the Church. And it is His will that His Church should grow, in the following interrelated ways:

- the personal holiness and transformation of His people (growth in depth)
- increased numbers of disciples of Jesus Christ (growth in numbers)
- the fruit of social righteousness and a transformed society (growth in impact)
- growing the Church is a gift from God and the normal activity of God
- growth is three-dimensional
- growth is seasonal
- things grow differently in different soil
- growth is about being connected to Christ and to one another.

9. **A final thought and key question...**

One thing links the *Missio Dei*, Transformation and Growth – this is God's work, God is at the centre and in control. But we have a part to play and we should be obedient to engage with it and be open to it. We need to be open to being transformed by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are called to see what God is doing in our communities and join in with His mission, and we have a role to play (sowing or watering like Paul and Apollos) as God brings the growth – in number, in depth and in service.