

The Diocesan Framework is a series of geographic “Minster Communities”.

Diocesan Synod voted on the motion:

“This Synod approves the Diocesan Framework of Minster Communities”

A Minster Community (MC) is:

- A designated group of parishes, fresh expressions of church, and schools brought together collectively for mission, resourced through the leadership of a diverse ministry team comprised of clergy, licensed lay ministers and headteachers.
- Part of the global, national, and regional Church, rooted in our Anglican tradition and sharing a common life, with the parish central to our life and witness.
- Led by a diverse ministry team, that embodies the mutuality of ministries as a priority value, where team working becomes the norm. The ‘Minster’ characteristic, of gathering for support and sending for mission, is central to the team identity.

A Minster Community will:

- Be missionally outward focused and attentive to context, as they ‘seek the kingdom of God’ and live out their Everyday Faith.
- Be responsible for the discernment, engagement, and development of their local mission.
- Be supported in mission by appropriately targeted diocesan provision, primarily focussing on our 5 missional priorities (New, Reconciling, Eco, Intercultural, Intergenerational communities).
- Be a place of mutual discipleship where community vocation nurtures, releases and equips the individual vocation of all.
- Share financial resource realistically and generously.

A Minster Community has:

- A shared missional understanding worked out within the distinct elements of that community.
- An appointed minister for every Christian community (ordained/lay, stipendiary/non-stipendiary/volunteer).
- A number of parts, which resource and support the whole community for a particular missional or practical purpose e.g. administration, learning/training, schools engagement. In some Minster Communities these parts will be co-located in a Minster Church. In some communities they will be more dispersed, according to local context.
- A Minster Community ministry team, led by a designated leader (Lay or Ordained), who support and encourage mission and ministry across their area, focussing on missional discernment, discipleship and the vocation of the whole people of God.

A Minster Community ministry team leadership consists of a minimum of:

An oversight minister (*Synod passed an amendment that states this role will be an ordained role*)

A Growing Faith (schools, churches and households) focussed minister (Lay or Ordained)

Operations Director (admin / buildings / finance for the whole MC)

A locally contextually focussed minister (could be a pioneer)

The Diocesan Framework is intended to be flexible enough to work with both a greater, and fewer number of paid positions, depending on our resources. Within our current likely resources there is provision for 80-90 paid positions (including and allowing for our usual vacancy rate). Not all paid positions will be oversight ministers. Not all paid positions will be ordained ministers. There will be a diversity of oversight, authorised and associate ministers designated through the SBGT discernment process.

This will result in between 20-25 Minster Communities across the whole diocese.

Shaped By God Together: a continuing conversation

Why are we doing this?

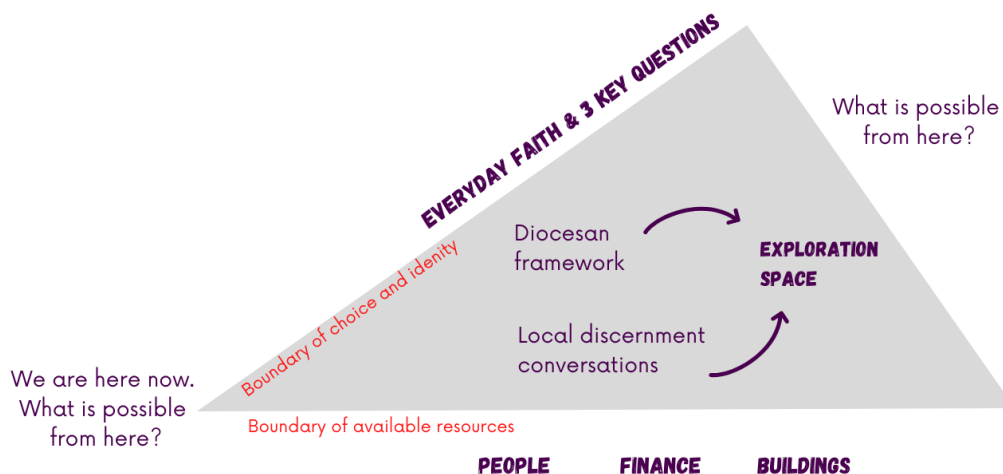
'Shaped By God Together' is a process of prayerfully and practically working out together how we live out our Everyday Faith in a new world. We are looking to the future and seeking to discern how God is reshaping us, exploring together a new diocese-wide framework for our ministry, finance and buildings to establish ways of working that enable all to flourish despite the challenges we face. We know we need to change – the pastoral burden on clergy, lay ministers and church officers is huge, our financial challenges are acute, and most importantly, we need to continually learn new ways to engage with the changing world, so that we make the most of the opportunities to live out our faith in a way that appeals to all whom we meet, and that ultimately reveals the Kingdom of God amongst us.

To enable us, as church, to do that most effectively, we need to consider our own wellbeing alongside the missional opportunities we have been given. We have heard time and time again that we cannot continue as we are, and simply stretch our resources ever thinner. We have big questions to face, and it is our task to do so.

Discernment Process: Where are we now?

We are navigating the space between our diocesan vision, our locally owned mission and ministry, and our diocesan boundaries to discern the future shape of our mission and ministry across the diocese. We have boundaries of choice and identity – summed up in our diocesan strategy of 'Everyday Faith' (expressed through our 3 Key Questions). We also have boundaries of our available resources – our people, our finances and our buildings. We have a space for discernment and decision within these boundaries, where we can imagine and plan for the future shape of ministry for our diocese.

We also have to work within the area of **governance**. This is not a boundary as such, rather it is something to be reshaped once the diocesan framework is agreed. We are looking for governance that best supports the common interests of the diocese, and the people it is intended to serve at heart.



A continuing conversation.

In July Extended Bishops Council considered three possible ministry models and the extensive feedback from Local Conversations across the diocese. They asked for a fusion of models A (Minster) and B (Mission Area), taking into account the positives of each, alongside the elements of concern and apprehension, to form a diocesan framework. This was developed and brought to a further Extended Bishops Council meeting in September. The **Diocesan Framework** commended by Bishops Council provides the structure, within the resource constraints of people, finance and buildings, that allows local parishes, Fresh Expressions of Church (FxC), chaplaincies, Education centres & Schools to work together to discern and deliver their shared calling to reveal the Kingdom of God through:

Growing the number of disciples, Nurturing the depth of discipleship, Engaging in loving service of the world.

As a diocese we express these through our 3 key questions, and 'Everyday Faith'.

The Transition and Implementation Process

A discernment process is being developed that draws from both diocesan informed, and locally informed knowledge. This process will result in the creation of Minster Communities that will combine to form an overarching diocesan framework for mission. A Minster Community may contain **one or more** of the following worshipping communities alongside parishes: Resourcing Church / Intercultural Worshipping Community / Fresh Expression of Church / School.

The process will involve facilitated conversations to explore options before a decision point is reached. The role of the Archdeacons and Bishops will be crucial to this, but will also inform, and be informed by Bishops Council, Synod and Bishops Leadership Team.

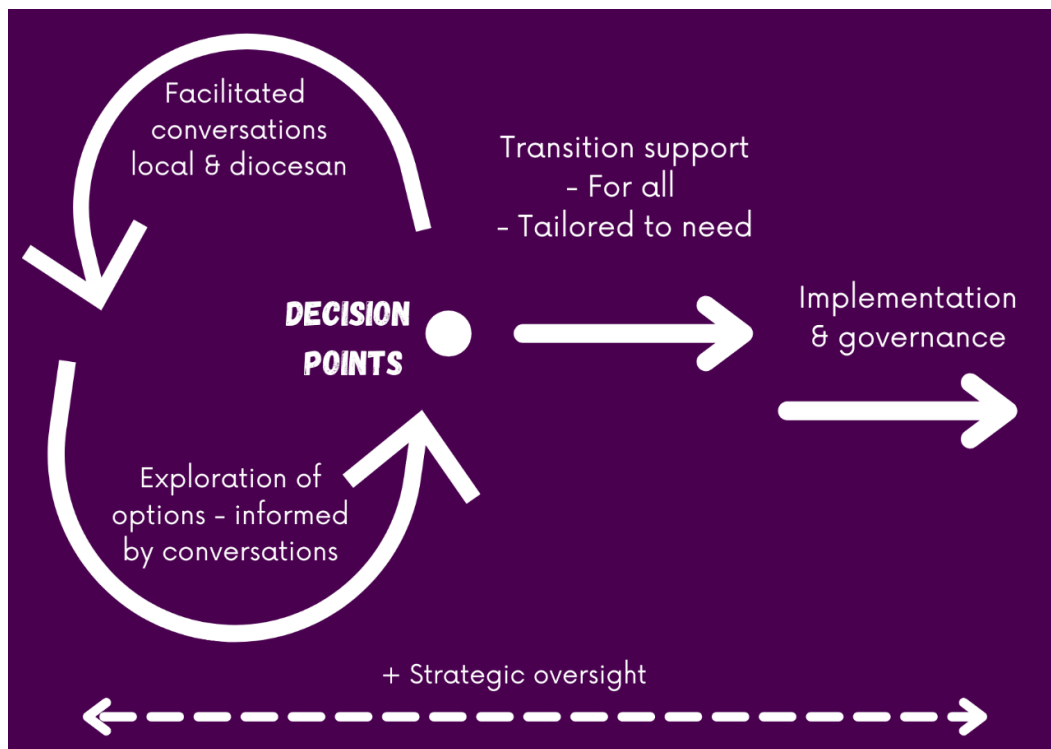
Step 1. Facilitated conversations across the diocese, drawing from local context reality and diocesan perspectives, to gather the data and stories that will enable an informed, open and honest conversation.

Step 2. Exploration of options: Discern the potential fit around the criteria for a Minster Community and nurture the spiritual climate necessary for ministry support and local ownership.

Step 3. Decision points: In partnership with our diocesan leadership, decide on the shape of the Minster Community, and begin to form and triage the primary areas to work within or return to more focussed local facilitated conversations with specific areas to address. The legal rights of incumbents and PCCs will be fully respected, while also recognising that ministry in the diocese is shared with the bishop and with the whole people of God.

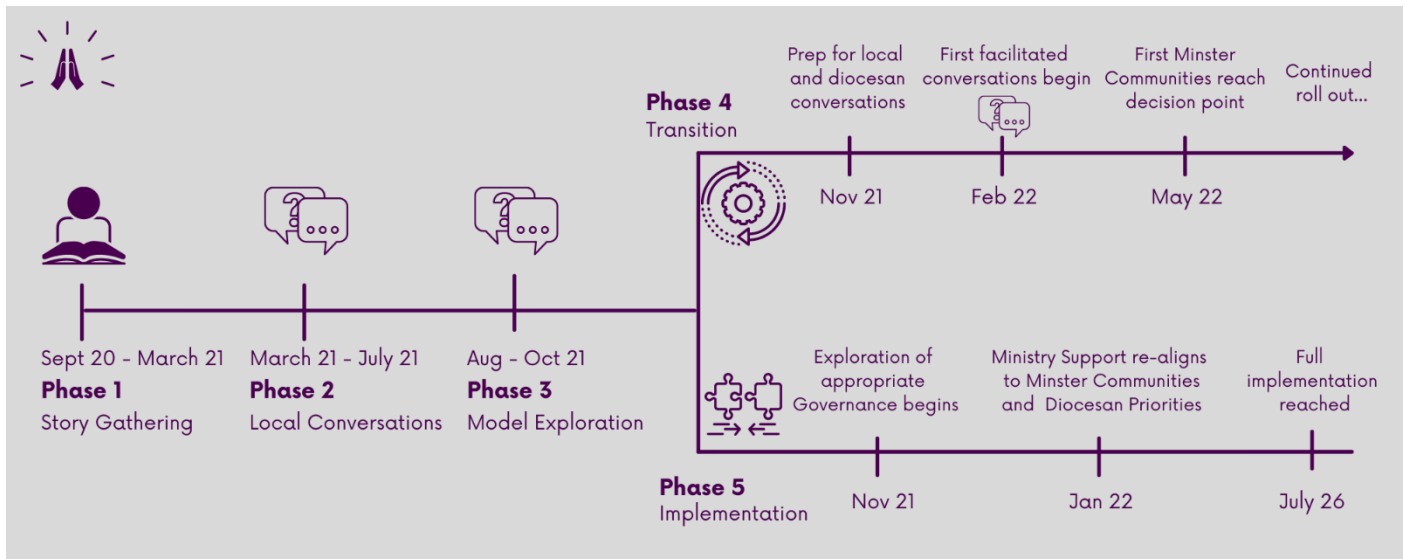
Step 4. Transition support: This will be both general and specific. There will be diocesan wide transition required, and also transition support tailored to each emerging Minster Community.

Step 5. Implementation and Governance. Formally create and learn to live the new reality alongside continuing missional discernment.



It is anticipated that initially most of the expected 80-90 paid positions would be stipendiary clergy, but our aspiration is for increased lay ministry. The shape of deployment within a Minster Community will be dependent on the outcomes of the Facilitated Conversations. Through this process there will be encouragement to think widely and creatively, ensuring that leadership has a diversity of gifts and styles and is right for the whole context.

Transition & Implementation Timeline



To make the Diocesan Framework a reality, there are two strands of change needed, cultural and structural. Phase 4 - **Transition** is how we adapt and develop new ways of being church together, developing diverse teams of leadership for ministry and mission, focussing even more on being church for and with the whole community in our context. This is the cultural change, or “how we do things together”.

Phase 5 - Implementation is how we bring about the practical and operational changes to support and enable all our churches, ordained and lay leaders to flourish. It includes re-aligning Ministry Support, moving to appropriate modes of governance that enable flexibility and sharing of responsibility, and ensuring administration and operations management is in place. This is the structural change.

What are the financial implications?

Current planning assumes that we will have less money to spend on ministry and ministry support in the coming years than we do now. There are several reasons for this, including the long-term downward trend in the real value of Parish Contributions, the end of current grant funding and the need to rein back our use of reserves. A reasonable assessment is that by 2026 we should be able to fund around 80 full time equivalent (FTE) stipendiary posts from the diocesan budget without having to use reserves to make up a deficit: this amounts to a reduction of about 20 FTE posts from what we currently have. By far the most significant factor that will affect what we can afford in the future is the level of Parish Contributions. We need to recover from the downturn of 2020 and 2021 arising from the covid pandemic and challenge parishes which have seen growth in unrestricted reserves over many years to contribute more realistically towards the cost of the ministry and support they receive – across the diocese as a whole unrestricted funds held by parishes grew by approximately £2 million in 2019-2020.

Concluding thoughts

If we had ‘enough money’ would we still do this?

Yes, or we’d need to do something like this – the process of thinking ahead to 2026 preceded Covid 19, lockdowns and our current financial situation. The acknowledgement that the Church of England needs to change and adapt has been commonly accepted for decades, we’re engaging seriously with questions of mission in the same way our predecessors in the faith had to.

Where does the parish fit into this?

The parish remains the backbone of the Church of England. We are grappling with questions as to how to best be present as Christian community within the parish and locality.

How will governance work?

The Archdeacons are working closely with the Diocesan Registrar on governance using the provision in Church Representation Rules to create Joint Church Councils. The JCC would be made up of representatives from all churches involved, and enable sharing of responsibility across the Minster Community, therefore reducing the burden placed on individual PCCs. The details would be worked out and agreed locally.

How do we ensure these changes are missional and not just focussed on administration, structural displacement activity and governance?

By seeking first the Kingdom of God. By keeping God at the centre of developments through prayer and engaging with the Bible. By being attentive, generous and creative in our plans. By holding each other to account in love and with grace.

What is the measure of success?

The extent to which we see the Kingdom of God growing in our midst. Christian communities around the diocese increasing in their efforts to lovingly serve the world, actively witness to the gospel, deepen their devotion to God, and give birth to new communities of faith.