

People Fully Alive: Ely 2025

– a strategy for growth

*A study course based on the “five levers”
devised for the South Leightonstone Group of Churches
Lent 2017*

Lever 1: **NURTURE** a confident people of God

Ephesians 4.1-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

PAUL IS IN prison. He is bound hand and foot but his mind is free. He recalls the times and places where through his preaching a church was founded. He writes to one of those congregations and reminds them of what Christ has done vv4-10. As he thinks of them he sees their faces, the family groups and the individuals, people born and brought up in the town, some from the countryside; many from further afield. They are a diverse group, in background, culture, experience and in the gifts God has given them. Yet all have the same purpose, to build up the Body of Christ so that God's people may grow together in truth and love. At the heart of our strategy is an expectation that God is at work in our midst. Only a renewed confidence in God will free us to risk innovation, experiment and change. By 2025 we aim to "raise the spiritual temperature" of the diocese. We therefore propose to develop a diocesan "Rule of Life", setting out the core elements of a living Christian faith, which everyone will be invited to live out in their own way.

ENGAGE

Christ's first followers were both called and sent: they were disciples and apostles (e.g. Luke.10:1-12). People grow as Christians partly by being drawn into patterns of prayer, worship and fellowship, but also by having their minds, hearts and wills reshaped through service to the world. The church has often seen service as secondary, flowing out from the supposedly more essential inner life of faith, but our strategy sets both elements side by side. As Christians we are citizens of the kingdom, in which the causes of justice and peace are inseparable from a right relationship with God. In support of this we will provide advice on community engagement, schools work, training in evangelism, sharing faith and apologetics, resources for Christians in the workplace.

GROW

Nothing we do can ever replace the need for a greater openness to the Holy Spirit, since church growth is ultimately God's work; but experience and research suggest that there are things we can do to help the church flourish. Research has shown that the majority of growing churches provide space for people to discover faith and explore life's deeper questions. We wish to see more congregations offer courses such as

Pilgrim, Alpha or Christianity Explored, and provide innovative ways to encourage exploration of faith.

DEEPEN

Central to our strategy is ensuring that all our activities are framed by attention to God. There should not be a sharp distinction between the ‘business life’ and the ‘prayer life’ of the diocese. We want to explore patterns of prayer (such as ‘Dwelling in the Word’) which will support the tasks of governance, management and planning, so that the whole of diocesan life, not just individual Christians, may become more transparent to the presence and activity of God. And we want to encourage spiritual growth in traditional ways too, such as Bible study, fellowship groups, discipleship programmes, Advent and Lent courses.

In what ways does our church / do our churches already address the issues raised?

What could / should we do better?

What would be hoping to achieve?

How much needs to be thought about and instigated as an individual; at a parish level; at a group level; at a deanery level; at a diocesan level...

Who has the expertise to guide these ideas?

What resources do we have, and how could we use them?

For further reading:

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Colossians 2:18-20

PERSONAL RESPONSE SHEET:

Are there comments you wish to make or suggestions you want to put forward in response to any of the issues raised in this session?

- *establish a diocesan Rule of Life*
- *provide training in evangelism, the sharing of faith and Christian apologetics*
- *encourage faith exploration through encounters and courses*
- *develop Dwelling in the Word*
- *develop whole life discipleship – not just church ministry*
- *promote small discipleship groups*
- *learning from and being inspired by links with the global church.*