

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 3: **SERVE** the local community

Matthew 5:13-16

‘You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL, Jesus calls those gathered around him to live distinctive lives - being salt and light to the world. In the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains what that means. Salt not only preserves, it also draws out flavours and sweetens food. Jesus tells the crowd that they, individually and collectively, are salt on earth. They are to enhance, to draw out all that is good. They are to engage in and with the world around them and make a difference. Salt is also an irritant, of course, which is a reminder of Christ’s prophetic voice. Jesus’ followers are also the light of the world: a light which makes darkness retreat; a light that attracts others. Christian people are to shine brightly in the world, to

help others find a way through the darkness. Salt is not very helpful if it remains in the salt cellar. A light hidden away is pointless. We are to be involved in the world where we live and work. We are to make a difference. Serving communities for the sake of God's kingdom is a central aspiration within our vision to be 'generous and visible people of Jesus Christ; and one of our three imperatives is to engage with our communities, local and global. Communities and community engagement are central to the Church's mission and strategy.

SUPPORTING THE MARGINALISED

There are already many examples across the diocese of churches engaging with their local community, being both salt and light. There is good collaboration with food banks, debt counselling and credit unions. The Mothers' Union works with prisoners and their families. Schemes such as Besom support the poorest in our society, and there are projects to help the homeless. Our strategy sees this kind of engagement as 'core' Christian activity, not an optional 'add-on.' A great deal of good and dedicated work in the community is already being carried out by many members of our churches. This is often not recognised as part of God's mission, either by those participating or by others around them. We will work, at local and at diocesan level, to enable Christians to see the significance of what they already do, and to affirm them in this.

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

Our work with schools remains a high priority - both designated Church Schools and non-church schools. Many in our congregations are already involved as school governors and visitors, or go in to take school assemblies. We will support school governors by providing better training, so that they are able to contribute to school improvement and help to develop the distinctive Christian ethos in our Church Schools. We also recognise that some clergy and lay people would serve better as school chaplains, so will invest in support for this type of schools ministry too. Part of our strategy for responding to new housing developments is to seek to create new Church Schools. For a number of years the church has been very good at providing pre-school care and meeting places for parents/carers with small children. Part of our strategy is to encourage more such groups, and to complement them with relationship courses, parenting groups and the like.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMON GOOD

Churches play a vital role in fostering inclusive communities. Our strategy aims to build confidence among Christians to join in public debate and take on civic duties and political responsibilities, in order to press for a more reconciled, just and peaceful society, and a sustainable environment.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

In Luke 10 Jesus commends his disciples to work with men and women of peace. Our strategy proposes to work with people of peace in our culture in order to be salt and light in, and for, the world. Before looking outside the churches of our diocese, however, we will consider how our diocesan structures, practices and processes could be adapted and improved to enable local churches to cooperate and support each other. There are already many projects working with Christians of other denominations, which the strategy will seek to encourage and strengthen, while also looking beyond the traditional ecumenical partnerships to build bonds of friendship and shared working with the new churches springing up across the diocese (eg community churches and black-majority churches). Likewise we will continue to work with a variety of Christian agencies operating in particular areas, such as Christians Against Poverty. Our concern to work with other Christians does not, of course, deflect our interest in cooperating with all those agencies and individuals who seek to contribute positively to the quality of public life.

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?

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?*

- *Is there any scope for credit unions, debt counselling, and so on in our area?*
- *What opportunities present themselves here for service to the community?*
- *Could we further develop work with schools, and how?*
- *How can we/do we foster involvement of our members in community service?*
- *What might we do to celebrate and support individuals who are involved?*
- *Who do we need to think about if we are serious about working in partnership?*
- *and...!*