

# 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 5: **TARGET** support to key areas

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’ So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.” Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.’

**E**ZEKIEL WAS ONE of the prophets sent by God to his people. This passage is vivid and powerful. It is often read at Pentecost to remind the Church that it is the work of God to revive us and bring new life. Christians have interpreted this passage using three timeframes. First, there was Israel in despair, to whom the prophet brought hope of renewal. Secondly, there was the once-for-all gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when God breathed new life into fearful, hopeless disciples. Thirdly, there is the Church of today, constantly in need of strength, renewal and inspiration by the Spirit. May God breathe new life into dry bones.

Although the good news of Jesus Christ always remains the same, the church is called to proclaim it afresh in each generation. Changes in culture and context mean that the church has to adapt, lest it become a quaint irrelevance, disconnected from the wider society it is called to serve. The strategy presupposes a diocesan ethos in which renewal and rebirth is seen as inevitable, imperative and ongoing. It also identifies some particular areas where the need for strategic change is particularly pressing.

#### **TARGETING RESOURCES**

Data collection and analysis is a key strategic tool. Together with other ways of describing local situations, hard evidence concerning church finance, attendance, activities, etc., will help us to understand better how diocesan resources are being invested, and how that investment may be used more effectively. Until now, support has been handed out in a fairly haphazard way. The strategy will review this to ensure that we target money and other resources where there is greatest need and greatest opportunity. Key areas for new investment will be market towns and new housing developments, Fresh Expressions and pioneering forms of ministry.

#### **‘SPECIAL MEASURES’**

In many places churches will continue to flourish, but there may be times when they do not fare well. Churches with good habits of self-review will recognise their situation and ask for help. The diocese is always ready to provide systems of accountability, accompaniment and investment to help bring about positive change. Occasionally, the initiative will have to come from outside, because decline and low morale have sapped the internal resources needed to face the future. There may be difficult conversations in such circumstances, and all involved will have to behave with maturity and tact. The term ‘Special Measures’ has been adopted for churches in this second category. It underlines the diocese’s concern, and its commitment to providing the support needed to achieve radical change. In a very small number of cases, mutual discernment may lead to the decision that a church should close, and its people find a new home within a more robust church community.

## **INTERIM MINISTRY**

Although most clergy and lay ministers will continue to serve in a particular place over a fairly long period of time, the strategy suggests that there may be a place for deployable 'interim ministers' who can offer short-term clearly defined support and leadership, either during vacancies or to increase capacity where there is particular need. More generally, the strategy will consider how we manage periods of vacancy, work allocation, recruitment and appointments.

## **DEPLOYMENT**

An important strand in this work will be the development of a ministry deployment plan to take account of the declining number of stipendiary priests. By 2025 the number of full-time, paid clergy in our diocese is likely to reduce from a little over 100 to around 80, so we need to think carefully about where they should be and what they should do. This will have an impact on deanery plans, ministerial development reviews and role descriptions for clergy and lay ministers. The strategy will also consider how we might use paid lay workers in a supporting role to release ministers for ministry.

## **FINANCIAL PLANNING**

Part of the strategy is to introduce a fundamental review of what we spend (a zero-based budget) in 2016, moving into a three-year budget programme from 2017. This will enable us to spend money more intentionally and develop longer-term plans. We also aim to give greater clarity to local churches about the costs of ministry and mission, and to highlight areas of financial vulnerability. We have to ensure that diocesan activities are sustainable (and be prepared to make tough decisions where they are not), but we also want to be ambitious, so we plan to launch an Ely 2025 Fund to support new initiatives.

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?

- *What are the “needs and opportunities” for diocesan support in our parishes*
- *What is a “flourishing” church, and how do we measure that?*
- *Could we make a case for a paid lay-worker in some particular area of ministry?*
- *How does being part of a group of parishes help us in respect of this topic?*
- *What new initiatives would we like to see, funded by the diocese or ourselves ?*
- *and...!*