

# DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

St Bene't's  
CAMBRIDGE

St Bene't's Church is experiencing an exciting time of growth and development. We are blessed with a diverse and growing congregation, and we have been developing ways of honouring and using the gifts of its members both in deepening the congregation's life and in service outside it. With a history reaching back almost 1000 years, we recognise with gratitude all that we have received from our forebears in faith, and as we look to our second millennium, we have sought to think prayerfully, imaginatively and generously about how to respond to the challenges and opportunities before us.

To seek to make the most of these opportunities, the PCC has compiled this Development Action Plan to help St Bene't's Church guide its path over the coming years. The PCC has put pen to paper in drawing the details of this plan, but it is the whole of St Bene't's Church that has directed the routes that we have explored, after congregational consultation and discussion.

As a framework to guide our plan we have used the structure adopted in the Imperatives of the Diocesan Strategy, outlined in the headings below. We have also used the Levers of Change (Nurture, Develop, Serve, Re-imagine and Target) to focus our plans in line with the Diocesan Strategy.

In each, key words are highlighted that sum up what the PCC and congregation have said that they find well formed, positive aspects of St Bene't's as we are now, needed to anchor any developments that occur. Then follow some areas that we hope to develop further.

## **Theological Note**

The imperative for thinking about development and growth is partly practical, but never just that. We are constantly mindful of St Paul's comment that 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth' (1 Cor. 3.6). Indeed, there has been a rather 'watery theme' to our discerning and discussing: drawing on the image of the river of the water of life in Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22 we have talked and prayed about what it might mean to see St Bene't's as one of the places from which and through which the river of the water of life flows – how our common life, rooted in prayer and worship, can spill out into the community. Another way of thinking of this is with the image of a reservoir (drawing on the wisdom of St Bernard of Clairvaux<sup>1</sup>), which overflows from a position of plenitude, and which recalls us to the importance of ensuring that our life is constantly rooted in and nourished by God, rather than driven by anxiety or ambition.

In Ezekiel's vision of the river of the water of life, as the river flows, it deepens, just as the Holy Spirit draws us ever deeper into the life of God, the well from which everything else we do overflows. So we have asked how we attend more fully to God; how we support people individually and communally in prayer, worship and study. By the side of the river grow trees, bearing fruit for food and leaves for healing. This river is life-giving to the communities through which it flows. So we have asked how our life in Christ engages with those outside the building, in a way that is healing and nourishing. Then St John the Divine picks up on Ezekiel's vision in the book of Revelation. Here it flows through the heavenly city, from the throne of God. This is our destination: here we have no lasting city, but we seek after the city that is to come (Hebrews 13.14f). This is the heavenly home God calls us to – and not just us, but all his people. So we have asked how we share the good news; how we encourage others to become disciples; how we help grow leaders and ministers who will take this vision into other places and contexts. In all this we acknowledge that we have much to learn; that working in partnership and collaboration with others is both good and wise; and that as we seek to give of what God has given us, so we will receive in ways that we cannot yet foresee.

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<sup>1</sup> The man who is wise, therefore, will see his life as more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself ... Today there are many in the Church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare ... You too must learn to await this fullness before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God. *On the Song of Songs, Sermon 18*

## I) Deepening our commitment to God

Relevant Levers: Nurture, Develop, Serve

### a) Current strengths

St Bene't's draws congregants with a **steady rhythm of worship, focused firmly on God and the Eucharist**, within a **building** that by its nature promotes **peace** and **contemplation**. The **traditions** of St Bene't's help promote the focus on **"full", accepting silences** during worship. The traditions of the Church are **honoured but not "fossilised"** and help to ensure a **familiar but dynamic** liturgy. It also feels a place and community that aims to be **actively inclusive** but **not pressuring, accepting** each person at their own point on the journey of faith.

- i) Our **prayerful life should extend further** from St Bene't's, both geographically and socially
  - (1) *Establish new prayer/home groups organised geographically, which could potentially link in with other parishes in the diocese, given that almost all the congregation live outside the geographical parish of St Bene't's.*
  - (2) *Review our pattern of daily services to see if additional services at other times of the day may serve those who work/socialise in the parish*
- ii) Our provision of **theological resources** should be expanded better to support both St Bene't's congregants and any who might benefit
  - (1) *Provision of online visual content such as commentaries, educational booklets, and materials to explore specific topics of faith more deeply*
  - (2) *Provision of online audio/video content such as sermons, and other materials as they are developed*
  - (3) *Provision of a more regular programme of theological teaching and discussion*
- iii) Our utilisation of **congregational gifts and knowledge** should be more effectively organised to the benefit of all
  - (1) *Expansion of Sunday 8pm evening lay-led services*
  - (2) *Expansion of lay-led groups such as Big Questions and Sunday Supplements*
- iv) Our support of **study and reflection** should be enhanced to allow more extensive engagement with the building of confidence and knowledge within the congregation
  - (1) *Facilitation of pilgrimages and/or retreats and quiet days (days/events offered at St Bene't's could easily be offered to other churches, if desired)*
  - (2) *Facilitation of events with local schools (building on congregational links)*

## 2) Engaging with need

Relevant Levers: Serve, Re-imagine, Target

### a) Current strengths

St Bene't's engages with need within its **own congregation and in the broader community local, national, and global**. We seek to engage with need in as many of its many forms as possible including **financial, spiritual, educational, physical and emotional**.

Examples include the **Cambridge Churches Homeless Project, Food bank, Mission Giving (global and local), Christian Aid events, hospital and home visits, provision of meals and hospitality, shelter in central Cambridge, pastoral visits** and provision of **Home Communion** and **Prayer**.

### b) Future areas for development

- i) **Direct contact with the community** should drive how we set our priorities for engagement, rather than our estimation of which needs are greatest
  - (1) *Connect with local businesses, the City Council and residents and find out what is already going on, what we could join in with, where there are gaps*
  - (2) *Congregational audit to see what people are already engaged in as individuals (work with refugees, dementia care, etc), and where/how others might join in/support each other*
- ii) **Re-imagine our physical surroundings** to be more available and readily accessible, to help us provide the **hospitality of space**
  - (1) *Improve physical access to the Church for all who wish to attend – the new entrance project will be a significant part of this aim*
  - (2) *Make changes to improve the visibility of St Bene't's during the daytime to encourage visitors and those in need of shelter to come in, and improve our interpretation of the building*
- iii) Our **financial support** of worthwhile causes should be maintained and, if possible, increased
  - (1) *We currently tithe approximately £12,000 annually (split between local, national and global communities in financial need)*
- iv) Our **educational programmes** should be made more accessible to everybody in the local community, including a focus on **ecumenical** and **interfaith** collaboration
  - (1) *Develop a more regular educational programme for those who work in Cambridge, residents and students*
  - (2) *Explore, with local faith leaders, ideas for collaboration in education and social justice between different faith communities in Cambridge*
- v) Our **ecological footprint** should be more central to our visions for development
  - (1) *Ensure that physical developments, such as the entrance project, promote local biodiversity*
  - (2) *Engage with green spaces in need of care in Cambridge, such as gardens in nursing homes, hospitals and areas of high-density housing*
  - (3) *Ensure all of our operations commit to the preservation and stewardship of the earth's resources*

### 3) Growing God's Church

Relevant Levers: Nurture, Develop, Serve, Re-imagine, Target

#### a) Current strengths

St Bene't's is a Church focused on the **Eucharist** with a **quiet spirituality** and **distinctive approach to children's work**. It is a place where **music** combines **prayerfully** with **silence** and the liturgy is supported by **thoughtful and challenging preaching**, in order to seek not just knowledge but **transformation**. Newcomers are **welcomed but not pressured** and are brought into a **socially and theologically inclusive community**. We currently welcome congregants to **daily morning Eucharist services, two Sunday Eucharist services (8am and 10am)** and an additional **Tuesday morning Eucharist**. Alongside these run **daily evening prayer**, and once monthly **Sunday evening reflective services**. There are also **seasonal prayer and study groups**. **New initiatives in deepening faith** have grown alongside an **increase in congregation size of about 30% in the last five years**. This also encompasses a **"dynamic stability"** in our number as we have many congregants who join for short periods of time and move on, such as students at the universities or visiting workers. In the last 4 years we have trained **one LLM**, and **six members** of the congregation have been recommended for **ordination training**. Our **governance structures** have been redesigned to share leadership more widely, and to offer space to draw on congregational gifts and help them grow.

#### b) Future areas for development

##### i) Responsive expansion: embracing current growth

**Space is limited** on an average Sunday 10am service, with our maximum capacity about 150 and average attendance over 130. Space for the **children's groups is especially short**.

- (1) *We will explore the provision of an additional Sunday Eucharistic service. The congregation is committed to St Bene't's being an inclusive, inter-generational community, and we do not wish to lose this precious element of our common life. And new service will seek to maintain this ethos, and we do not wish to lose this from the current 10am Eucharist.*
- (2) *We recognise that we will need to increase opportunities for members of the congregations to get to know each other, in order foster a common sense of belonging.*

##### ii) Intentional expansion: encouraging future growth

- (1) *Engage with students, tourists and local workers – explore:*
  - (a) *Lunchtime services with food*
  - (b) *Expansion of evening services*
- (2) *Partnership with another parish church in the longer term*
  - (a) *Explore partnership with other parishes to discern areas of need/potential collaboration*
  - (b) *Church grafting or planting*
- (3) *Engage with students and other Cambridge city churches to develop resources for vocational discernment*