



New Fire in London.

Bishop Richard Chartres, Lambeth Lecture, 30 September 2015

The Church in the Diocese of London in 1990.

The decline in the active membership of the Church of England as a whole in the last quarter of the 20th century was mirrored and exaggerated in London. Many of the congregations were ageing and found it difficult to engage the young people who were flooding into the capital from other parts of the UK and from abroad. At the same time the disproportionate rise in London house prices made flight from the capital increasingly alluring for many of the people who had been the backbone of the church in the post-war period.

The parish of which I became Vicar in 1984 was an extreme case study of these general trends. St Stephen's Rochester Row in the mid-1980s had already experienced twenty years of decline. At the beginning of the social revolution in the 1960s there had been about 550 members on the electoral roll and an assistant staff of 6 curates and four nuns. There was even a daughter church, St John's, the result of a 1950s church plant. By the time I arrived as the Reverend Mr Ichabod – "the glory has departed" - there was an average Sunday attendance of 40, no assistant staff and the daughter church had been turned into the HQ of the London Diocesan Fund.

In the 80s and 90s, there were increasing financial problems for parishes in the Diocese, both because of the shrinkage of the worshipping base and as a result of deterioration in the national finances of the Church. Like many organisations, the Church, through the General Synod, had voted for generous pension arrangements which, as the numbers of serving and retired clergy reached parity, were only sustainable with great difficulty.

There was an outcry over the folly of borrowing money to increase the property element in the portfolio of the Church Commissioners at a time when they were arguably already over-weighted in property, but by contrast the most serious failure was very popular in Synodical circles. This involved maximising income by the means of various expedients like purchasing short term bonds, which enabled the Commissioners to over-distribute in the 1980s to great applause, but at a considerable cost to capital growth and intergenerational equity.

In 1997 the Commissioners' pension obligations were eventually capped, and a new scheme was launched with even higher contributions from hard pressed diocesan common funds. Nationally, the Commissioners' distributions to dioceses were reduced. Rightly the lion's share of the funds went to poorly endowed Dioceses, but the formula on which the distributions were made did not include any element for actual deprivation, which has resulted in chronic under-investment in Birmingham, Manchester and other great conurbations.

London was effectively dis-endowed since it was presumed to be one of the richer dioceses -- which of course it is, but only in parts. It also includes boroughs like Tower Hamlets and Hackney, which are among the poorest in the country, and the financial challenge contributed to an atmosphere of depression about the prospects for the Church going forward.

Some of the more reflective members of the then diocesan team had internalised the all but universal view of the new establishment in the media that the story of God could have only one end: relegation to the leisure sector. Buildings were seen as a burden, and it certainly remains true that an established but largely dis-endowed church carries a disproportionate share of the responsibility for maintaining an architectural and cultural heritage which regulatory bodies rightly insist belongs to the whole community. In London the landscape is littered by churches in prime sites which were abandoned during these years – St Paul’s Essex Rd, St Columba’s Mare Street, Holy Trinity Mile End and many more. Often sold to less careful owners, their decrepitude continues to be powerful propaganda for the idea that we are “at the sagging end and chapter’s close” of the Church of England story in London. We can regret this now, but at the time it seemed to be inevitable and even meritorious that the Church should retreat from what could be regarded as imperial over-reach to associate itself with the voiceless in the back streets. Sympathy with vulnerable local communities also led the church into sustained opposition to major new developments, notably Canary Wharf where no attempt was made to establish a Christian presence in what was effectively a new town with a working population which now exceeds that of Leicester.

If there had been any appetite for church extension, financial constraints were a major dis-incentive. The Diocesan Budget was in deficit most years and necessitated the sale of historic assets, chiefly property, in a process described by the then Diocesan Secretary as reaching into “his hip pocket”. The standard of administration in Diocesan House, where appointments were often made on a “pastoral” rather than a professional basis, justified many of the frequent complaints from parish clergy and contributed to a sense of drift and consequent fragmentation as people identified with their own parish or Area over against the “Diocese”.

In 1979 the diocese had adopted an Area Scheme which, with its clear delegation of responsibilities, has many virtues and at its best permits the possibility of experiment together with mutual accountability. Unfortunately by the end of the 1980s the Areas had effectively become five Dioceses; Area-itis was rife, and Area Bishops were very reluctant to discuss common policies. Even appointments between Areas became problematic as the Areas developed ever more divergent cultures. The debate over the ordination of women contributed to intense factional strife which militated against any common action. It is significant that London was one of the small number of Dioceses which had voted against the ordination of women proposals at the beginning of the 1990s.

Uniquely, the Area System in London had also generated an additional tier of synodical government in the shape of Area Synods. One of the Area Bishops was on record as declaring that “a bishop without a synod was like a husband who has not consummated his marriage”. To compound the resulting complexity of governance there was an energy-sapping superstructure of boards and committees for Mission, Unity, Ministry, Social Responsibility and the like, all of which had been established during the period of decline with the professed aim of widening participation in decision-making and stimulating action. The result, of course, was the very opposite as I discovered as Chairman of the Board of Ministry. Over-worked members of the Diocesan staff found themselves discussing the same issues over and over again in slightly different forums. There were ideas in plenty and not a few “initiatives” but little energy left over for implementation.

Fortunately what happens in the Church of England at a Diocesan or National level is very remote from the day to day life in parishes and chaplaincies. The consequences of mistaken policies and dysfunctional structures do eventually infect the Church at every level, but it takes a good deal of time for the disease to become visible let alone terminal. All the while there were wonderfully faithful priests and lay people who were persevering in worship and zealously doing good works. In my own parish, people like Theresa, who had been commissioned into the Church Army by Wilson Carlile himself, together with May, Mabel, Stanley, and a small band of stalwarts, mostly over seventy and in some cases eighty, were proof against the discouragement of these spiritually lean times. Their memories and commitment opened up new possibilities. It was possibly an advantage that the situation seemed to be so dire and the contrast with palmier years so stark.

At a Diocesan level the arrival of David Hope in 1991 helped to change the atmosphere. His parish visits improved morale and his introduction of Mission Action Planning focussed attention on growth rather than on the various divisive issues. With his impeccable Catholic credentials he steadied the ship after the departure of his predecessor for the Roman Catholic Church, and navigated the turbulence following the Synod vote on the Ordination of Women.

All too soon he was appointed to York, but not before inviting me as Bishop of Stepney to take part in a review of the structures of the Diocese.

I was surprised to be invited to succeed Bishop David at the end of 1995 but the London representatives on the Appointments Commission were clear that the Hope direction of travel should be pursued. In consequence, I already had a modest blueprint for change.

First I had to find somewhere to live and identified the Old Deanery close to St Paul's Cathedral. For nearly a quarter of a century it had been a Scandinavian merchant bank but had fallen victim to the "kroner crisis" of the early 1900s. With the assistance of the Church Commissioners we were able to obtain the lease and create a modest lodging in the former servants' quarters. No bishop had lived in the city since the 17th century and the move to the Old Deanery transformed relations both with City institutions and with St Paul's where I continue to celebrate regularly on Friday mornings.

One of the first tasks was to carry through the abolition of the extra tier of synodical government and all the Boards not protected by law. The crucial changes were effected by 1997. At the same time we amalgamated all the statutory bodies with the Bishop's Council. No one has ever said to me "if only we had a Board of Mission we would have done some mission". Instead a black hole of energy was closed and, as a result, effort directed to supporting those individuals and places which signalled life and possessed the missionary gene.

One such place was Holy Trinity Brompton whose leaders had experienced a measure of frustration in their dealings with the Kensington Area hierarchy. Alpha was beginning to develop into the global movement that it is today, and there were voices within HTB urging that a base outside the Church of England would be more conducive to growth. The local hierarchy was unwilling to see HTB as much more than a conventional parish in the Area, and in particular was keen to restrict the numbers of curates that the Church could employ, even though there was finance available to enlarge the staff. The restrictions were fuelled by a liberal distaste for charismatic evangelicalism and a conviction that the supply of curates should be evenly spread throughout the Diocese, irrespective of the capacity to pay.

There was an important principle here, also expressed in the Common Fund system. The Diocesan budget was calculated on the basis of the establishment figure for clergy numbers, together with elements for administration and national church obligations. The total sum was then divided between parishes by reference to a complex formula which relied heavily on electoral roll numbers, with the consequence that a church in decline would be more and more heavily subsidised by any that were growing. There was in effect a tax on growth and an incentive to be less than candid in declaring parochial resources. This may have been tolerable when the Diocese still enjoyed a substantial benefit from the distributions of the Church Commissioners but, as these declined in significance and pension obligations in particular mounted, the contributors to the system were increasingly restive as they saw that they were being asked to subsidize less active neighbours. It was clear that a crisis of consent could not be long delayed.

The Diocesan team was under pressure to “do something” about parishes where nothing much seemed to be happening, but legislative protection for incumbents and parish independence inhibited action and undermined any sense of mutual accountability. In the 1980s, in one parish which sociologically offered good prospects for the Church of England, an elderly single-handed parson was replaced by the standard bearer for one of the extreme churchmanship factions. The new man was given two able curates financed by the London Diocesan Fund, and within two years the electoral roll which had stood at 110 had been reduced to 75. It apparently occurred to no one that this was a scandalous situation. What right had any outsider to criticise parochial policies?

Change takes a very long time in the Church of England and is mainly dependent on the appointments made. It takes time to accumulate sufficient knowledge of people and places. Just as research by Bob Jackson suggests that we move priests too frequently, and that some of the best and most transformative work is done around year 12, of an incumbency so bishops have to be prepared for the long haul, with a clear direction of travel coupled with a readiness to seize opportunities when they arise.

Growth springs from movements of the Holy Spirit, and from communities and individuals in whom there is life-giving sap. Bishops can do very little alone. They can seek to remove obstacles, and to make wise appointments. Pronouncements can usefully change an atmosphere, but too many “Diocesan initiatives” can be a distraction and contribute to weariness and even cynicism among the clergy, especially if they suspect that the bishop is trying to make a name for himself.

A bishop's work in promoting health and growth in the Diocese is nevertheless vital, although hardly anyone else is in a position to see the complexity and interlocking nature of the process which creates propitious conditions. Despite the opportunities offered by solemn assemblies, much episcopal work is invisible and should lead to a conviction on the part of parishes and people that “we” have been blessed and inspired by the Spirit to do things beyond our own capacity. Bishops should *do* more than they *say*, and when their ministry is at an end people should be saying “Amazing – we did it all by ourselves”.

The images which have become most resonant for me in describing a bishop's work spring from a conviction that our most important role is in blessing and, very occasionally, withholding an apostolic blessing.

Our blessing should be informed by the vision that is given to a “holarch” who has the privilege of seeing the church at work in a vast number of places and people. The story of the sons of Zebedee puts a question mark against the forms of hierarchy which operate in other organisations, but a bishop who studies to see holistically and is serious about being a “knot in the net” -- connecting the communities in the Diocese with the church throughout the world and in all ages has a proper authority. Some of the best bishops are no great loss to the parochial ministry, where many saints are to be found. Bishops are more like conductors of the orchestra, who may not be the most gifted instrumental players but who are charged to keep close to the score and to fashion a new interpretation of a symphony out of talented soloists.

I have been much influenced by St Paul’s reference to “partners in the gospel” which seems to establish the right relationship with other members of the community. I deplore the descent into an employee-employer relationship with the clergy, which could be one of the consequences of the new conditions of service legislation.

Spiritually speaking, if a bishop desires the health of the Church then he must lay to heart St Paul’s advice to the elders of Ephesus in Acts XX: 28, “take heed to yourselves” and then “to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you episkopoi”. It is also salutary to remember the saying of St Augustine that “for you I am a bishop; with you I am a Christian”. Shipwreck awaits anybody who assimilates their role and their person. I believe that I am working for the Bishopric of London, I happen to be the 132nd holder of the brand, the local successor to the apostles, but it is vital to understand one’s own frailties and limitations, and not be tempted to personal inflation. The one thing that cannot be delegated is one’s own prayer and study of the scriptures. An MBA in ecclesiastical administration is no substitute for the development of a beginner’s mind and acquiring the teachability with which the Spirit can work. I do not doubt that we can learn much from the experience of other organisations, but the church should also have a non-exclusive confidence in its own experience.

When in the temple at the heart of some great act of worship uttering the words of Christ our great High Priest, a lively distinction between role and person deflects any insidious growth of a sense of entitlement; and when on the ramparts of the earthly Jerusalem acting as a watchman, the bishop must be alert and prepared for advent -- the future that is coming from God, and not merely the future which we can extrapolate from current trends.

Source of blessing, holarch, knot in the net, conductor of the symphony, ambassador for Christ our High Priest, partner in the gospel, watchman from the walls: I have interrupted the account of the policies and changes which I believe have contributed to health in the Diocese of London, because I am aware of the functional atheism of parts of the contemporary church. I simply do not believe that the Spirit who is the author of growth is mere mould grown on the rock of economics and programmes and policies by themselves can have only a limited effect.

Being appointed as a bishop has been an education. Like many introverts, my default position is as an observer and commentator; episcopal responsibilities compelled me to become a committed midwife of change, which began with simplification and clearing away the clutter while maintaining a lively confidence in God.

Almost immediately after my appointment to London, I was confronted with three instructive challenges. A highly respected Archdeacon brought papers for me to sign closing Holy Trinity Sloane Street. It was, he said, impermeable territory and the recently retired incumbent had been very depressed by the lack of response to his efforts. All the relevant committees had concluded that the church should be closed. Holy Trinity was of course very beautiful, a cathedral of the Arts and Crafts movement, but appealing to such things was regarded as sentimental. Apart from those with antiquarian interests, the collective thinking about buildings in those days was very functional and tended to the view that "our buildings were a burden".

I was very reluctant to accept the thesis that a church like Holy Trinity was unsustainable, and I also discovered that, if we gave it up, there was no prospect of profit since it would simply revert to the Cadogan estate. I said "no". It could very easily have been a disastrous decision, establishing a reputation right at the beginning of my episcopate as an impractical dreamer; an expensive liability for a Diocese struggling with solvency. But the decision was vindicated by the inspiring quality of the church itself and the appointment of the multi-talented Bishop Michael Marshall. Woodenness is both more common and more dangerous than wickedness in the Church of England. Michael has extraordinary imagination and soon filled the church with life and a ministry reimagined for the 21st century.

St Ethelburga's Bishopsgate was another early challenge. It had suffered collateral damage in the IRA bomb which devastated Bishopsgate in 1993. I was Bishop of Stepney at the time, and felt strongly that the terrorists ought not to be allowed to demolish an ancient church which had survived both the Great Fire and the blitz. But I was out-voted 12-1 in the Diocesan staff meeting, and the decision was taken to build office accommodation on the site, incorporating a fragment of the shattered interior. If, in the immediate aftermath of the explosion, the bishop had stood in the rubble and vowed to rebuild Ethelburga's, he would have received generous support from fellow sufferers like the NatWest bank; but instead it was decided to hold an architectural competition for an office block while paying out considerable sums for storing the Grade 1 rubble.

The financial situation was complicated since the Archdeacon, for what appeared to be good reasons at the time, had removed the buildings insurance only a week before the bomb exploded. In my first month as Bishop of London, the City Planners rejected by 18 votes to 1 the scheme proposed by the winner of the competition and we were left with very limited local sympathy, a loss of some hundreds of thousands of pounds, and no assistance from the insurers.

The decision to rebuild the church as a Centre of Reconciliation and Peace was perhaps rash, and gave me a crash course in the difficulties of fund-raising once the trail has become cold. I enlisted the support of Cardinal Hume and other Christian friends and secured a generous grant from the Clothworkers' Company. Caroline and I invited the Court of the Company to dinner, the menu for which was extracted from the Diary of that notable Clothworker, Samuel Pepys. The only aspect of the meal that was not authentic was the choice of wine. Pepys only mentions one chateau of the Bordeaux, Haut Brion, and it was impossibly expensive. We substituted a Chilean red from old vines which unlike their French equivalents had never suffered from the scourge of phylloxera and so could claim to be authentic.

One of the few things said of bishops in the New Testament is that they should be lovers of hospitality [Titus 1: 8] and at every level in the Church it is hardly justifiable to occupy such generous accommodation without using it to draw people together for good causes.

The balance, however, of the £3.5 million bill for the restoration of the church was proving very difficult to raise until I met Victor Churchill by chance on the day of his retirement from CCLA. "I really don't know what I am going to do with myself", he said. "I may be able to help", I replied. Victor saved the project, which was eventually opened by the Prince of Wales and has entered a new and vigorous phase under the chairmanship of Sir Tony Baldry.

St Ethelburga's was not the only City Church to find a new purpose. One of the most controversial issues facing the new Bishop of London in 1995 was the Templeman Report, which had recommended the mothballing of all but four of the City Churches. The number of churches surviving from the days when the old City teemed with residents had been seen as a problem for well over a century. The City churches with tiny congregations were not meeting their ministry costs, and had to be subsidised from elsewhere in the Diocese. They did not fit the available models of health and viability. There were good reasons for the radical surgery proposed by the Report, but it had also provoked predictable hostility among the menaced incumbents. I decided to reject the recommendations but realised that, unless some action was taken, the underlying problems would resurface soon enough and once again the bishop would be exposed as a romantic unable to face brute reality.

The solution took time and again involved the combination of a clear direction of travel with the energy to seize opportunities when they arose. Part of the answer was a partnership with a remarkable layman, Martin Sargeant, who had an eye for development possibilities and enjoyed considerable respect from the City Corporation and developers alike. His negotiating skills and attention to detail were also crucial in turning ideas into profitable ventures where both the Diocese and a range of Christian-based enterprises were benefited. One significant example is the lease of All Hallows London Wall to XLP, which under Patrick Regan is doing some difficult but vital Christian work with hard-to-reach young people both north and south of the Thames.

Twenty years after the Templeman Report the City Churches remain open, serving a variety of purposes, and each with its own niche ministry. Ministry costs are under control and instead of being a scandalous drain on Diocesan resources the City Churches are a substantial net contributor.

After the bonfire of the Boards we next changed the Common Fund system and planned for a balanced budget. We reduced the mysteries of the old formula by inviting each parish to pay for its ministry costs while the property income from Diocesan glebe was increased by better management and applied to non-parochial costs, both at a Diocesan and National Church level notably the financing of ordinand training. Well-financed parishes were encouraged to pay over the odds to support Christian ministry in areas of need. The effect was to abolish the fine on growth and release money to be spent close to where it was raised. It proved to be possible to support the work of the church in less affluent areas although, as so often, parishes which had been subsidised proved willing and able to rise to the challenge of greater self-sufficiency. Probably the greatest burden fell on the middle range of parishes, which were expected to pay their full ministry costs. Heroic efforts were made to increase regular giving, supported by a healthy increase in letting income from church halls and the like.

The result was that, despite constant hikes in the level of pension contributions, we were able to balance the budget, restore confidence in the management of Diocesan finances, avoid the easy and disastrous cost-cutting strategies involving the elimination of able assistant staff, and still maintain a presence in some of Britain's most deprived boroughs, as well as our major investment in university and other significant but expensive chaplaincies.

In the year 2000, the Diocesan team was strengthened by the arrival of Keith Robinson who had taken a major cut in salary to move from his post as Chief Executive of the London Stock Exchange to become General Secretary of the Diocese. He had already, as a volunteer, made an important contribution to the simplification of Diocesan structures, and set about teaching me the value and practice of good management.

The changes which had already been made required a development of the structure and ethos of Diocesan administration. Staff who had previously reported to boards and committees now had to take decisions themselves, and be accountable for them.

The Diocesan Secretary and I met regularly, and our partnership was fundamental to the task of transcending faction and building a 'can-do' atmosphere. I am always astonished by the distance that I have observed between the Diocesan Secretary and the Bishop in other places. It is a vital relationship, but one which is delicate. Professional administration and Diocesan Offices in the Church of England developed in the inter-war years. Recently there has been a fashion for re-defining the role of the General Secretary as Diocesan Chief Executive. Following secular models, this makes the bishop into a non-executive chairman and, given the legal structures of the Church, this can easily lead to divided counsels and conflict. A more accurate model might be the relationship of a Chief Operating Officer with an Executive Chair. In any case I have irritated successive General Secretaries by suggesting that the title was good enough for Comrade Stalin and ought to be good enough for them.

It is vital that, in a period of change, Bishop and Secretary Whomsoever should meet regularly, both for day to day business and for scanning the horizon. Bishop and Secretary share a synoptic view of the whole Diocese which it is difficult for anyone else to acquire. Both should be aware of one another's thinking, be able to refine that thinking, and support one another when the going gets tough.

In the London case this key partnership was complemented by the contribution of the Bishop of Willesden. Any Diocesan should be clear about his incompetencies and mine were only too obvious. In particular, when I sometimes feel that I have made myself clear what others have heard is often opaque and occasionally baffling. Pete Broadbent is direct and unvarnished in his communications. He has vast experience as a member of Islington Borough Council and as a serial Synodsman. In style and political convictions he is a contrast to the Diocesan, but the partnership works because we are committed to the common cause. He has skills of advocacy and a command of detail which are superlative, and which the Diocesan Bishop does not have. I continue to be astonished that the Church nationally has been so slow to recognise his huge talents, but it has certainly been to the advantage of the Diocese of London that he has been prepared to stay without for an instant curdling.

Unity in the Diocesan team and in the structure of the Diocese has been an important ingredient in being able to pursue consistent policies addressed to growth. In London the Bishop's Council is also the Board of Finance, and this structure is preferable to one in which the two bodies are separate legal entities. When the two are separate the result can sometimes be to increase the significance of the Chairman of the Board of Finance to the point where he/she becomes the *de facto* if not the *de jure* boss of the Diocesan Secretary. This can separate bishop from secretary, and in some cases I have noticed the bishop's office and the diocesan office can even become two rival centres of power. I believe that it is wrong in principle for the Diocesan Bishop to wash his hands of responsibility for the administration of the diocese. The one thing no diocesan can delegate, apart from his prayers and study, is responsibility for the ethos of the diocese and in day-to-day reality this ethos is expressed or subverted in administration.

Keith Robinson set about making those changes in Diocesan House which were visible to very few but had a large impact. Lines of accountability were clarified, and two new positions were created – the directors of Finance and Property. Commercial recruitment firms were used to identify high quality people from the private sector at comparable salaries. In the past decade the successive directors have more than justified their salaries by generating fresh sources of income and effective cost-cutting.

We significantly reduced the number of Diocesan advisers in the belief that financial resources were better deployed in local mission initiatives.

This latter process may even have gone too far and we have been in danger of cutting beyond the bone at Diocesan House. My experience of other diocesan administrations, through the work of the national Spending Plans Review Task Group suggests that some dioceses just do not have the capacity to imagine and develop new projects. Development grants are available, but often not the capacity to make use of them. Lack of capacity tends to restrict activity to keeping the present structures gently winding down.

Keith also produced for the first time monthly management accounts, which were scrutinised by a “Senior Management Group” in Diocesan House. The effectiveness of the SMG led to some grumbling among Archdeacons, who felt excluded from some of the decision-making processes. The Archdeacons are an invaluable interface with the worshipping communities in the diocese, but their role has radically changed with the advent of more professional lay management. Unfortunately the habit in the Church of England of making changes by juxtaposing new structures without replacing the old ones has often led to confusion.

In London we established a joint operations team [JOT] chaired by the Bishop of Willesden, to bring together the Archdeacons with the Senior Management Group and to focus on implementation of agreed policies. There has never been a shortage of ideas in the Diocese. The problem has most often been a plethora of initiatives and failures of implementation.

There have been a number of other significant changes, in which successive Diocesan Secretaries have been crucially involved. It has taken us corporately a very long time to understand that the church’s business is communicating. It is not a question of taking a decision or devising a policy and then asking as an add-on “How is this to be communicated?” The communications implications need to be factored in at the very beginning of the process of reflection. We used to have an in-house Director of Communications, but any individual can only have a restricted range of talents and, as part of the Diocesan structure, it was easy for such post-holders to become prey to the collective delusions which are almost inevitably developed in any leadership group. By employing an external partnership – Luther Pendragon – we gained access to a wider range of skills at less cost. At the same time we acquired a critical friend who could help us to see ourselves as others see us, and dispel the complacent assumptions which conceal the marginal impact of the church in London.

In the year 2000 we were still reeling from the elimination of the Church Commissioners’ support for stipends and the greatly increased pension contributions. There were not only large deficits but a huge overdraft had been negotiated, and bank interest was a substantial annual charge in the diocesan accounts.

Improved morale enabled us to set the facts out starkly in a consultative document entitled "Time for Decision". This went to every worshipping community, and the consultation was led by all the bishops. 86% of the parishes responded and a clear plan of action was developed and carried through. Common Fund giving was boosted by 8.5%. The revenues from investment property were greatly increased. Somnolent parishes were challenged, and the budget was balanced. In 2015 we shall achieve a balanced budget for the tenth year in succession. By contrast, in the ten years prior to 2005, cumulative losses exceeded £8 million.

The healthier financial situation enabled the diocese to avoid the widespread formula of reducing clergy numbers by multiplying the number of churches for which an individual cleric is responsible. This may be an effective cost-cutting strategy but it is not an effective mission strategy and is calculated only to maintain congregations rather than growing them. We were much assisted by the researches of Bob Jackson, who encouraged us to continue to defy conventional wisdom about the efficacy of fashionable notions about team ministries and ecumenical projects.

Clergy and even bishops very often give their best years to campaigning for changes which seem to lie within the capacity of a particular synodical generation to effect. These are most often presented, in the early stages of the debate, as being crucial contributions to bringing the people of England back into church. Lay participation in church government, liturgical change, schemes of church union, reform of marriage discipline, and the ordination of women were all arguably sensible measures, but the idea that they would halt or reverse the decline in church membership failed to take into account the profound character of the social and intellectual changes which had led to the contraction of the church-going part of the population. Internal bickering over the changes did, however, waste energy, and played a further part in alienating some of the church's traditional supporters.

While there was understandable fretting about the historic failure of the Church of England to embed itself in urban working-class culture, there was less awareness of the Church's fresh failure to relate to the "management" at every level of society as -- influenced by the ersatz parliamentary model which had been adopted by the General Synod -- the Church increasingly conducted its affairs in an inward-looking party spirit.

Every care was taken in the Diocese to respect differences of opinion on the issues of the day, but at the same time to contain debate within an agreed common framework distilled from the most fundamental God-given purposes of the Christian community.

One obvious source of division was the training of the clergy in party colleges, and an effort was made to overcome this aspect of the old system while eschewing any attempt to homogenise the proper diversity of the Church of England. One of the underlying principles of the past twenty years in London has been that every legitimate strand in the Anglican tradition should be honoured and reflected in the appointments made in the Diocese. There is only one vital distinction which transcends the differences between different strands of churchmanship and that is the distinction between dead church and living church.

Everyone should have a spoon in the soup, thereby avoiding the polarisation that often arises from subordinating the appointments processes to the will of transient synodical majorities or -- even worse -- ideologically driven bishops. Of course the desire to be comprehensive sometimes leads to risky appointments which are not successful. In particular, finding conservative evangelicals who are capable and willing enough to work constructively across the whole gamut of church life has proved challenging.

The desire to stimulate vocations and to train ordinands in a context in which every legitimate tradition could be honoured had an impact on perhaps the most significant development of the past twenty years: the establishment of St Mellitus College.

In the old system candidates were entrusted to independent training agencies, often founded along party lines. Candidates from inner city London entered colleges which then sent them on to places like Leicester to get "inner city experience". The relationship between ordinands and colleges was often collusive. Although candidates were technically only recommended for "ordination training", the reality was that, after entry into college, ordination followed on the ordinand's own terms, unless they were detected in some spectacular misdemeanour. Deciding that candidates were unsuitable at an early stage of training carried financial penalties which were very damaging for struggling small institutions like theological colleges, while recommending weak candidates for ordination transferred any problems to dioceses. This argued for training that was both more contextual and more closely related to the region where most candidates could expect to serve. Most important, however, was a growing dissatisfaction with how theology was being taught as a dull echo of the fashion dominant in the secular academy as subject like any other, which could be divorced from the life of the worshipping community.

Some apothegms of Evagrius Ponticus were especially influential in the design of St Mellitus College: "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly you are a theologian" [*Texts on Prayer no.60*]; "Breast of the Lord; knowledge of God. He who rests against it a theologian shall he be" [*Ad. Mon. 120*].

For a number of years I had been casting about for some more adequate patterns of training for the priesthood which might inhabit these truths, and the situation was transformed by the arrival of Graham Tomlin. His remarkable combination of gifts of teaching, diplomacy and administration turned a vague dream into an institution which this term will be preparing more than 200 candidates for the priesthood. A thriving hub has been established in Liverpool to serve the North West, and interest has been expressed in the Mellitus approach from various parts of the UK and beyond.

The setting up of the College is an example of how London's lean but effective structures assist with the mission priority. Close collaborative working between all those immediately involved, notably our partners in the Chelmsford Diocese, led to the speedy conversion of a church into the training college. The statutory bodies were involved only at the point where formal consents were required.

St Mellitus was a major "diocesan" initiative carried through with the invaluable assistance of the St Paul's Theological Centre, an offshoot of HTB. Most of the time, however, the underlying philosophy of the past twenty years has been to locate most of the resources-- both human and financial -- in local parishes and mission communities, in the belief that it is at the local level that resources will be used most effectively for mission.

I was very struck by a remark of Rick Warren, the American Mega-Church leader, to the effect that he had spent "too much time on para-church and not enough on parish church". The vision of a church serving the whole of its neighbourhood, and not merely growing on the basis of like attracting like, is a very noble one. Unfortunately, the comprehensively devolved character of the Church of England makes it relatively easy for small groups to get themselves into a position where they can appropriate the resources which ought to belong to the whole community, and to build a church with only limited outreach. In extreme cases the result is very far from a genuine parish church, and remote from the "cutting edge of mission", with the parochial leadership occupying a caravan well to the rear of the battle.

It is obvious that, while there is huge virtue in the parish church ideal, the parochial system in the Church of England, with its excess of law, is open to being manipulated by small groups who wish to frustrate unwelcome mission initiatives. In an urban setting, while flexible agreements about areas of pastoral care for each parish church are clearly desirable, mission to networks that are not principally defined geographically argues for an unfreezing of rigid parochial boundaries that have long since ceased to correspond to sociological realities. In the turbulent circumstances of the early Anglo-Saxon Church the "parish" was understood as the area of a bishop's jurisdiction. Once again it might be wise to go back to the future.

As well as St Mellitus; investing in the local; voting for life in all its diversity; and eschewing add-on initiatives, an attempt has been made over the past decade to offer a framework to stimulate missionary work, and to provide a common language for greater pan-diocesan conversation and unity. The intention was not to produce an “add-on” to the burdens of hard-pressed clergy and parish leaders, but to give a picture of what was going on and, by “adding up” the various currents in the diocese, contribute to confidence and release fresh energies.

The first essay in ‘add-up not add-on’ was not very successful and is largely forgotten. “London Bridges” was regarded with great suspicion, was too much associated with the Diocesan Bishop, and failed to secure much more than acquiescence from the Areas. There was, and continued to be, active opposition from certain Area teams to any common framework. Publically expressed and constructive criticism should always be welcome, but subversives, “weevils of the commonwealth”, those who damage morale by cynicism and gossip have to be weeded out. Bishops need a reliable intelligence system, and the resolve to deal with serial nay-sayers.

With the assistance of our communications team at Luther Pendragon, the successor to “London Bridges”, “London Challenge” was a great improvement. It was designed to run for seven years culminating in the London Olympics of 2012. The “seven commitments” offered a map within which local communities could locate their own work and aspirations. It also gave the London Diocesan Office a clearer sense of priorities. It stimulated growth and confidence but was still under-prepared, and never really entered the DNA in some Areas.

There was much to learn from London Bridges and London Challenge and, with the assistance of the new General Secretary, Andy Brookes, we took the risk of employing someone to prepare the post- Olympic policy framework which we christened “Capital Vision 2020”. Debbie Clinton was invaluable and, after literally thousands of conversations, we distilled the wisdom of the worshipping community in the Diocese into three words which really have entered the bloodstream: Confidence, Compassion, and Creativity.

There is nothing very startling in the little CV2020 brochures which are designed to fit into travel card holders, but the aspiration to be a “Christ-centred and outward-looking church” is widely shared. We are well on the way to equipping and commissioning our 100,000 ambassadors for Christ by 2020. [I wanted 144,000 but was overruled by colleagues who said that we would look like Jehovah’s Witnesses.] We are also making progress with increasing the numbers of ordinands by 50%, not only for our own needs but for those of the wider church.

The Capital Vision focus on compassion has freshened our awareness of the Church's social responsibilities in 21st century London. The appointment of Adrian Newman to the Stepney Area was a godsend, and he has helped to re-imagine the Church's outreach in an era of credit unions and food banks. His work with "London Citizens", the community organising network, is in the finest traditions of Christian work in the East End.

But we have to recognise that hostility to London in other parts of the UK is a significant political fact. We have always sought to be mindful of the needs of the church nationally. If there is one phrase from the gospels which is especially resonant for me it is "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life". God is *generous*, and I hope and pray that generosity is a mark of what we seek to do together. St Mellitus, for example, is committed to "generous orthodoxy". Generosity also inflects another current which has been of huge significance these past twenty years: church planting.

Church planting in the nineteenth century was very often an Anglo-Catholic phenomenon. More recently the charismatic evangelicals have taken the lead. Holy Trinity Brompton made its pioneering church plant into St Barnabas Addison Road in the mid-1980s but the pace of planting has really picked up post-2000 with the establishment of a plant at St Paul's Hammersmith.

I remember a crucial conversation with Sandy Millar, one of the most significant Christian leaders of the past half century. Rather ungraciously, I was musing about whether the HTB ethos was really transplantable beyond a bourgeois social context. "What about those places in deprived east London boroughs -- would it work there?" I wondered. The reply was, "Where would you like us to go?" I named a number of churches which had reached a point of no return. I was then humbled by Sandy's decision to move, with Annette, to become Priest-in-charge of St Mark's Tollington Park, where they laid the foundations for remarkable and sustained growth.

In 2005, another church planter from the HTB stable, Ric Thorpe, moved into Shadwell in the abandoned docklands of London's old East End. Initially there was scepticism among neighbouring clergy and attempts to sabotage the scheme, but Rick's own graciousness and the rapid growth of a new worshipping community -- which proceeded very soon to plant other churches in the vicinity -- converted the critics.

Under Capital Vision 2020, we are pledged to establish 100 new worshipping communities in the Diocese in the next five years. Some will be rejuvenated parish churches, but others will be in new locations. The latest statistics from the Greater London Authority, released in July, suggest that the capital's population is growing rapidly. It now stands at more than 8.5 million (by contrast Scotland's population is 5.3m). The Diocese of London accounts for just under half of this figure with our neighbours in Southwark, Chelmsford and Rochester making up the total.

Births are falling and outward migration increasing, and in consequence London is becoming even more international. The international in-flow was 170,000 in 2013 and 200,000 last year. By 2020, the best estimate is that London will have 9.2 million residents, besides the hundreds of thousands who travel in daily to work. We are currently considering the prospects for church extension in ten development areas in the Diocese where 175,000 new residents will be housed.

There is a lively debate about church planting strategy, and the practice has developed beyond the charismatic constituency. A fresh approach is exemplified by the work of John Wood in Tottenham, who has stimulated new Christian life in places like the Broadwater Farm Estate without introducing any Christian reinforcements incubated outside the immediate area, but working in close partnership with the London City Mission.

As the prospects for institutional mergers fade, the opportunities for unselfconscious ecumenical work at the local level become clearer. In London in many contexts we have entered a post-denominational phase. Very few of the hundreds of thousands of students studying in the universities of the capital arrive with any clear ecclesial identity. They are looking for communities of faith that are vigorous and spiritually credible, without being too concerned about the denominational label. In particular, the old opposition between the "Established" church and Dissenters has largely faded, and the possibilities of street level co-operation with allies like the Redeemed Church of God run by Pastor Agu have vastly increased.

Discerning which developments to bless and which to discourage demands a healthy but not uncritical love for how the Church of England has striven to communicate the gospel from generation to generation. I have always sought to balance active support for new ways of doing things with an emphatic advocacy of the tradition of the Church expressed in the Book of Common Prayer and the Authorised Version of the Bible.

Traditionalism is the obstinate adherence to the *mores* of the day before yesterday – the dead faith of living people. Tradition is the spirit-filled continuity of the Church's life, through which the truth is communicated from generation to generation in fresh ways in order to stay the same. Tradition is the living faith which we share with dead people. Actually often the hardest task is to persuade yesterday's *avant-garde* that they are today's busted flush.

The continuing identity of the Church is expressed in a pithy and balanced way in the Preface to the Declaration of Assent, which I encourage all office-holders to learn by heart. It begins by asserting that “the Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”, and life in the Diocese has been immeasurably fertilized by our two covenanted relationships with the Anglican Communion in Angola and Mozambique and with the Evangelical Church in the Diocese of Berlin-Brandenburg. Rachel Treweek played an especially creative role in deepening our partnership with Lusophone Africa. These relationships have both challenged and taught us about ourselves.

At the same time we have actively sought relationships with other dioceses. The partnerships with Chelmsford and Liverpool in the Mellitus venture are especially significant. Some suspicions of church-planting in other dioceses have been superseded by requests for help in establishing city centre resource churches. Work has been done in Brighton, Lincoln and Bournemouth with an exciting new venture in Birmingham and plans for Plymouth. In every case part of the DNA of the model is loyalty to the local Bishop and local missionary effort.

The revival of the See of Islington is intended to provide greater capacity to achieve our pledge of establishing 100 new worshipping communities in London by 2020, but it is also intended to be a gift to the Church nationally. My prayer is that it will be possible to learn from our experience -- and especially our mistakes -- so that other places will be able to surpass our successes.

This November I shall complete twenty years in office as Bishop of London. I feel that I have only just begun and, as I scan the horizon, the challenges ahead for the Church are only too obvious. In an increasingly international city we have a long way to go before we transcend our Anglophone, East Saxon constituency. The face of leadership of the Church still does not even mirror the face of the church in the pews, let alone the life around us.

We struggle to penetrate those places where the future of London as a prosperous, competitive, but above all liveable city is being debated. The privilege of contributing to the education of 60,000 young Londoners every day in our Church Schools is always under threat from changes in philosophy and policy. Nevertheless, there have been great achievements over the past decade in increasing church school places, especially in our secondary schools; and some progress in articulating a fresh answer to the question of what we are trying to do, as a Christian community, in our contribution to educational provision, beyond simply maintaining the schools established by previous generations.

The need for greater clarity and a confident response to the incessant propaganda directed against so called “faith schools” has been recognised in the Diocese, and is one of the themes of Capital Vision 2020 which has risen to the top of the agenda in the current year.

But, as well as the visible perils, there is great promise. The leadership being offered by the present Archbishop of Canterbury is creating an encouraging national context for work in the Diocese. It is ever clearer that, in all the debates about social need and the search for models of relating in which healthful and peaceable ways of living can be incubated, there are so many pointers to the necessity of a network of local communities which resemble the parish communities the Church of England has sought to grow and nourish over many centuries.

Above all, humans are shape-shifters who shape their futures by reference to some idea or iconic figure to whom they attach worth -- whom they worship. Most commonly, perhaps, in our own day life in all its fullness is believed to come from unconstrained consumption with little interest beyond the process itself. But perpetual Carnival and no ensuing Lent results in nausea (as well as an unsustainable burden on the NHS).

God, who so loved the world that he was *generous* and gave himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, has shown us a better way. Having spent much of the first half of my life wrapped in gloom as a *laudator temporis acti*, these days I find cheerfulness constantly breaking in.

There will certainly be trials ahead, and vast spiritual turbulence, but, with the re-composition of the London team to build on the work done by their predecessors, there is energy and wisdom enough to navigate the white water ahead. The Christian community will continue to thrive as long as it is vision-led and not problem-led. Prayer of the persevering kind that marks the 24/7 prayer movement really does open the door to God’s future while the Holy Spirit never leaves himself without witnesses. When my name survives only in a litter of plaques marking school extension openings and the refurbished loos at St James’s Clerkenwell, I am convinced that future Bishops of London will be able, with Haggai, to say, “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former saith the Lord of Hosts.”

+Richard Londin

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