



## A letter to the Diocese of Oxford

Dear Friends

At Pentecost, God poured out the Holy Spirit on the early Church. The Spirit changes everything and helps us to become more like Jesus Christ. The Spirit equips and empowers us for God's mission in every age. The Spirit helps us to be salt and light in God's world.

Our world faces many challenges. The recent terror attacks in Manchester and London remind us of the challenge of building a strong, united society. This week, Britain goes to the polls in a general election. A few days after that, the detailed negotiations about Brexit are set to begin.

The world and our nation need us to be the best Church we can be in such a time as this.

I have now visited 22 of our 29 deaneries as I listen to what is happening across the diocese. So far I've met with over 2000 people who have shared their hopes and vision and questions with me. I look forward to visiting the remaining 7 deaneries by the end of July.

I've seen a huge amount that is good. The diocese has a shared understanding of God's mission, one of the strongest legacies of Living Faith. There are many outstanding examples of compassionate service, deep engagement in prayer and some remarkable pioneering ventures. Together we are a network of more than a thousand churches, chaplaincies and schools in every part of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Bucks and Milton Keynes.

I've talked in my deanery visits about the kind of Church we are called to be. The simple call to become a more Christ-like Church has resonated very deeply whenever I have shared it. The Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel speak to us very clearly about what it means to be a Christ like Church: we are called to be contemplative, compassionate and courageous in all we attempt together.

I've found an appetite for a fresh vision and strategy across the Diocese of Oxford and a desire to work together to create that vision in the coming months. Our communities are changing all the time. There are new things happening in our wider society. The population is growing. Our work in

schools is developing. We must reflect on all these changes and decide where our new priorities lie and what kind of future we want to build together.

In May, 120 people from across the diocese came together for a major conference: Towards a Common Vision. I invited Lay Chairs, Area Deans, Bishop's Council, some leaders of larger churches, BAME Anglicans and those who work with children and young people.

The conference was a time to test out some developing ideas about what kind of church we are called to be and about what we are called to do together: our areas of focus for the next seven years.

I gave three reflections based on the story of the raising of Lazarus on what it means to be a contemplative, compassionate and courageous church. These themes were welcomed by people of many different traditions. You can find these reflections on the [diocesan website](#) together with other materials from the conference.

There was a significant amount of energy, joy and hope in the three day conference. Thank you for your prayers for our time together. We did some initial work together on six possible strategic priority areas. These now need more work, reflection and wider consultation in the autumn. We will be doing more work on our emerging vision and strategy at our Diocesan Synod on 17 June and Bishop's Council on 12 July. I will write again with some more details about how we will widen this conversation in a few weeks' time.

Please continue to pray with me that we continue to become more contemplative, compassionate and courageous and that we put Christ at the heart of everything we do as we move forward together.

With love and prayers

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Steven Oxford." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+Steven