# TIME TO GROW TOGETHER

A decade-long diocesan strategy: 2027 and beyond

DIOCESE OF LINCOLN

TIME TO GROW TOGETHER



# INTRODUCTION

*"A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen..."*

In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13.3-9), Jesus teaches us about growth, abundance, hard work and the extravagance with which God shares his good news in the world. He invites us to listen, and so we set our ten-year journey in the context of his word. May God sow seeds of grace within our hearts as we live, work and pray together – his people in Greater Lincolnshire.



## FROM CHANGE...

**The first part of our journey has been one of significant *change*. There were things we needed to face up to, whether it was 'selling the family silver' as we poured our historic assets into sustaining the unsustainable, or placing greater burdens upon our ministers and churches with no plan for how to manage them.**

We are not strangers to change in the Diocese of Lincoln. We pioneered Ordained Local Ministry and Authorised Lay Ministry in the Church of England, recognising a rich tapestry of callings to serve in new ways. In the 1950s, it was the Lincolnshire parishes in South Ormsby who began the first 'adventure in friendship' and chose to work together for the flourishing of local churches, and the benefit of rural ministers sharing each other's gifts and talents.

Greater Lincolnshire is vast and diverse. We are England's second largest diocese by area, with over 600 church buildings (many of them listed). Many of our parishes are small, while some serve large estates and areas of new build homes. Our population is split almost equally between rural and urban areas. There are pockets of considerable wealth as well as deprivation, and poverty is often hidden or ignored in rural communities. There is a strong sense of local identity and pride, yet our communities are often not served well by transport and amenities. The number of people attending our churches continues to fall dramatically, and our Christian giving is historically low, compared with almost any other English diocese.

The work of *Time to Change Together* has been about sowing the seeds of good news in the midst of these changing and challenging contexts. The Parable of the Sower invites us to reflect on those times and places where the soil has been shallow, where our hard work has not taken root, and where thorns have tied us down and held us back from becoming all that God wants us to be.

## ...TO GROWTH

**The parable ends with a beautiful image of growth – growth which looks different in different places. The seeds planted in good soil bear much fruit: 'some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.' Let us be encouraged that growth comes in many shapes and sizes, and together, it yields a mighty harvest!**

Our vision for the Diocese of Lincoln over the next ten years has not changed. We carry with us the memory of Bishop Edward King, who sought to nurture 'more Christlike Christians.' We are still called 'to serve our communities in such a way that people come to know the love of God in Jesus and have their lives transformed.' We still want to be a diocese filled with *faithful, confident and joyful* Christians.

When Jesus taught his disciples about the kingdom of heaven, he spoke of one 'who brings out of their treasure what is new and what is old' (Matthew 13.52). In God's economy, we can both treasure our past and look forward to our future. In the same spirit, our vision for growth is shaped by two words – **new** and **renew** – as we seek to pioneer new ventures and breathe new life into all that has gone before.



## A FAMILIAR FOUNDATION

*The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
*the **love** of God,*
*and the **fellowship** of the Holy Spirit...*

The words of The Grace are known to Christians all over the world – we're going to use these powerful words to help us focus on growth:

- Like the soil, let our hearts be open to the seeds of grace with which Jesus brings life to our faith.
- Like the sower, let us share the love of God extravagantly with those who have not yet heard the good news.
- Like the different yields of a great harvest, let us work together, in fellowship with one another and the Holy Spirit, to do God's work in Greater Lincolnshire.

There is good soil in Greater Lincolnshire, good seed to sow, and good news to share. It is *time to grow, together*.



## FROM TIME TO CHANGE TOGETHER...

***Time to Change Together* (TTCT) began in 2019 as a vision for our shared future in the Diocese of Lincoln. It was our response to serious financial, ministerial and missional challenges, and it became a journey towards growth and sustainability, with a commitment to the flourishing of the local church, partnership working, and wise stewardship of our resources.**

After in-depth work by five lever groups, and public consultations involving hundreds of people from across the diocese, we formally launched TTCT at Diocesan Synod in April 2021, with a series of recommendations and commitments which would shape our life together. Here are just some of those key outcomes we aspired to:

In the five years since 2021, there has been a huge diocesan effort to implement TTCT. We have achieved so much together, but it's clear that in different places, the pace of change has varied considerably. There is still more work to do.

An evaluation of TTCT took place in 2025 which has helped us to identify some ongoing aspirations:

- continue to embed the Parish Support Service as a resource for the whole diocese
- promote *Seeking God: Seeking Growth* as a resource for parishes and LMPs
- develop more resources for faith and discipleship
- encourage a culture of 'permission giving' and trying new things
- invest in recruitment and training for focal ministry
- explore new and ongoing mission initiatives among younger generations
- review our LMP worship and mission plans, alongside discernment of church types
- consider our response to churches which don't pledge or keep their pledges
- revisit the excellent work of our Covenant Pastors

As we began to look ahead to the next ten years of life in the Diocese of Lincoln, this review of our progress has been welcome and timely. The journey doesn't end here – now it is time to shift our focus from change to growth...

| Recommendation | Commitment |
|---|---|
| To grow in numbers, diversity and service | Team working; reaching young people, diverse forms of church; prayer |
| To embed the principle that 'no minister is an independent practitioner' | Collaborative working underpinned by training, wellbeing and support |
| To seek the flourishing of different types of churches within LMPs | Respecting local discernment; furthering unity; encouraging aspiration |
| To have the right people, in the right places, at the right time | Ministerial wellbeing; pastoral care; vocational discernment |
| To embrace generous and sacrificial giving which supports local ministry | Transparency in finances; investment of historic assets for the good of all |
| To deploy Covenant Pastors who will help to develop a local culture of generosity | Unity in Christ: 'all the members of the body, though many, are one body' |
| To invest in a Parish Support Service which serves the needs of our churches | Support, training and administration which lifts the burden from the local church |

## ...TO TIME TO GROW TOGETHER

**The report *Time to Change Together* from 2021 reminded us that 'ultimately growth is God's work and our call is to participate in God's work' – for it is God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3.6). We have laid some significant foundations during the past five years, and now we want to build on them for the growth and flourishing of God's people.**

The ten-year strategy outlined in these pages is not a new programme. Think of *Time to Grow Together* (TTGT) as the next chapter in our book, or the next phase of our journey. Our diocesan calling remains the same: 'to serve our communities in such a way that people come to know the love of God in Jesus and have their lives transformed.' We will continue to do this through *faithful worship, confident discipleship and joyful service*. But remember that we are also called to 'proclaim afresh in each generation' the faith that we have received. Now is the right time to re-focus our faith, our efforts and our resources appropriately.

This work has followed a similar process to TTCT: supported by a Strategy Working Group, five lever groups, each with a lay and ordained co-chair, explored key areas of diocesan life: growth, discipleship, people, places and resources. During 2025-26, hundreds of people from across the diocese gathered both in-person and online at a series of Engagement Events. Diocesan Synod has considered the developing proposals at every step of the way. In all the different ways you have engaged with our challenges, priorities and aspirations, you have shaped the work of *Time to Grow Together*.

We believe that we can grow by investing in God's people in Greater Lincolnshire. Like the sower planting seeds in good soil, we believe that the investment of time, skill, relationship and resource will lead to the transformation of lives that we long for.

Our work needs to be underpinned by prayer. The Grace, a prayer known to Christians around the world which speaks of God's **grace**, **love** and **fellowship**, has inspired the work of *Time to Grow Together* and shaped **three key priorities** for our diocese:

*Through grace, we are* **energised by faith in Jesus**

*With love, we are* **reaching our missing groups and generations**

*In fellowship, we are* **putting collaboration at the heart of our common life**

We want these priorities to shape our life and work together over the next ten years. They will inform our decision-making and our investment of time, energy and resources. They remind us that everything we do rests in the hands of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We do not make this journey alone. As part of the Church of England, we have ensured that our key priorities align with those established by the national Church's Vision & Strategy:

*In grace, we seek to become* **a church of missionary disciples**

*In love, we seek to be* **a church that is younger and more diverse**

*In fellowship, we seek to be* **a church where mixed ecology is the norm**

Time to Grow Together is planted in the rich soil of Greater Lincolnshire, and draws nourishment from the faith, labour and vision of generations of Christians that have followed Jesus here.



# CHALLENGES

**In broad themes, here are some of the key challenges which people across the diocese have shared through our Engagement Events and as part of Lever Groups during 2025-26.**

*Time to Grow Together* is our commitment to action. In line with our three key priorities, there are things that we can and must do to address these challenges. Many of these will require the investment of people and money, both from our diocese and the national Church.

## WHO WE ARE

- We're a large diocese which can feel remote and isolated.
- There is a culture of 'us and them'.
- We experience sadness and sense of failure about our past, present and future.
- It can feel like we prioritise rules and regulations rather than permission-giving.
- Our county is facing wider issues around agriculture, flooding, erosion and extremism.

## MISSION

- There are noticeable gaps in our congregations: children, families, young adults, men of all ages.
- Our worship and church life can be inaccessible for newcomers, making them feel like outsiders.
- We talk about hospitality, but it often stops as soon as we've handed over the hymnbook.
- The Church is seen as irrelevant in modern society.

## LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

- We're not confident in talking about our faith.
- Being a Christian is more than going to church on Sundays.
- There aren't enough opportunities to learn about faith and grow.
- It's not easy to try new things in church.

## MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP

- We are asking more of fewer people.
- The wellbeing of our ministers is a real concern.
- Too many of our churches are experiencing long-term vacancies.
- We talk about collaboration but it's not happening where we need it to.
- Gifts, skills and talents often go unrecognised.
- It's easy for unhealthy power dynamics and poor relationships to fester.

## OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS

- We have too many buildings which lack basic provision and aren't fit for purpose.
- Our beautiful historic buildings can be a drain on energy and resources.
- There aren't enough people to keep our buildings open during the week.
- National and local processes for church buildings often feel slow and complicated.

## GENEROUS GIVING

- We are all facing increased costs.
- Financial giving among our congregations is low.
- People's attitudes to giving aren't informed by Christian generosity.
- The Church is seen as wealthy, which means people are less likely to give.



# PRIORITY 1

# TO BE ENERGISED BY FAITH IN JESUS



Through **the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ**, we want more people:

- to come to know the redeeming love of God in Jesus
- to deepen their faith through prayer, worship, study, sharing faith, offering hospitality and acts of loving service
- to have a revitalised and enriched faith which shapes every part of their lives

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Raising aspirations and expectations for spiritual growth.
- Releasing resources for the service of God's kingdom.
- Re-discovering the baptismal vocation of every Christian.
- Growing in confidence in sharing the good news.
- Aligning investments with people and places for mission and worship.

## ACTIONS

### BUILDINGS FIT FOR MISSION

- Establish a programme of reviewing church types and the viability of our buildings in each LMP.
- Create a 'Welcoming Spaces' programme aimed at mission churches, to fund a minimum provision of facilities, such as toilet, kitchen, Wi-Fi, nature-rich outdoor spaces and low carbon heating solutions.
- Develop the work and remit of the Diocesan Churches Trust both in maintaining our beautiful heritage and opening up options for the future.
- Provide a toolkit for closure and transition where needed, to help churches end well.
- Encourage the growth of *new worshipping communities* in and beyond the church building. This may be particularly suitable in areas where the building does not have good facilities, where there is no church building, and areas such as new housing developments.

### QUALITY OF OUR WORSHIP AND FORMATION

- Broaden the range of liturgical resources and learning opportunities we offer for:
  - all ages.
  - different church expressions.
  - smaller churches, home groups and study groups.
  - seekers, explorers, and those new to faith.
- Provide a range of quiet days, courses and short retreats for spiritual growth and refreshment.
- Create an LMP toolkit for the planning, delivery and signposting of a diverse range of worship, spirituality, and discipleship.
- Invest in our digital presence and offer online platforms for churches and LMPs.
- Invest in a diocesan role for Spirituality and Worship, to equip churches and individuals with support for quality worship, spiritual development (including spiritual direction), and Christian formation across contexts and traditions.
- Redevelop a *Community of Prayer* for the diocese, focused on growth, and encourage initiatives like 'Thy Kingdom Come' and the '1:1 Pledge'.

# PRIORITY 2

# TO REACH OUR MISSING GROUPS AND GENERATIONS



With **the love of God**, we want more people:

- to experience a life-changing encounter with God
- to grow in confidence in their identities as children of God
- to find welcome and belonging as part of the body of Christ

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Engaging well with younger generations who are open to exploring faith
- Re-imagined models of church for different generations and experiences
- Proclaiming the gospel afresh in every generation
- Offering radical inclusion, hospitality and welcome.

## ACTIONS

### GROWTH

- Revitalise the Transformation Fund as the 'Venture Fund', with the encouragement for churches to try new things; invite every church to try one new thing every year.
- Invest in our Key Mission Churches as hubs for growth and resourcing within LMPs, with clear expectations and models of support.
- Explore different options for church revitalisation and planting within different traditions (e.g. evangelical, central, catholic), alongside support for the work already established through SDF.
- Strengthen our work with children, youth and families in key locations, through recruitment of CYF workers and the development of LMP mission planning.
- Establish a pilot project with church schools to resource school chaplains and youth workers linked with local churches and LMPs.
- Develop bespoke resources to help churches of all types engage with young people and adults.
- Create discipleship pathways for different groups, generations and stages of faith.

### HOSPITALITY

- Equip churches seeking and responding to community needs with a Christian offer.
- Develop resources for churches to connect with the rhythms and life of the local community, offering presence, peace and prayer.
- Support churches in maximising their buildings (e.g. *Welcoming Spaces* programme), encouraging new worshipping communities, and resources for worship and learning.

### WIDER CONTEXT

- Create a distinct strategy for rural church growth in Greater Lincolnshire, which recognises the challenges and opportunities unique to our diocese.
- Develop the work of Growing Faith, in collaboration with the Diocesan Board of Education, to build relationships between schools, churches and households.
- Invest in our application of local and national data, by recruiting a data analyst to develop a model for 'healthy churches' in the diocese and help us prioritise growth and investment.

# PRIORITY 3

# TO PUT COLLABORATION AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMON LIFE



In **the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**, we want more people:

- to find their part in tending and serving the people and places in God's world
- to find strength and wholeness in healthy relationships and collegiality
- to discover what it means to be a member of 'one body' each with complementary gifts, talents, callings and skills

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Ministry for mission which seeks the flourishing of people and places
- Building local and global relationships as part of the universal Church
- Enabling the people we are to shape the work we do
- Building vocational conversations into every stage of faith

## ACTIONS

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Create a diocesan Leadership Academy to equip and train church leaders of all kinds, including Churchwardens, ALMs, CYF Workers, Readers and Clergy.
- Prioritise ministerial wellbeing and good practice through investment in pastoral supervision, coaching and mentoring, first incumbency support and increased staff capacity.
- Provide a diocesan handbook which lays out clear role descriptions and shared expectations for church leaders, including church, LMP, DP, archdeaconry, diocesan and episcopal roles and responsibilities.
- Provide safe and supportive structures for church leaders and LMPs to explore ventures which require some appropriate risk-taking.
- Foster a stronger culture of calling and discernment, with local 'watching briefs' for raising up vocations to ministry.

### PARTNERSHIP WORKING AT EVERY LEVEL

- Offer bespoke training in collaboration, relationships, listening skills, difference and respect at every level of church relationships
- Invest time, people and resource in partnerships: local, ecumenical, national, global
- Prioritise safer working and safeguarding in our communities through the work of Parish Safeguarding Officers, Safeguarding Champions across wider areas, and Resilient Communities planning.
- Diversify opportunities for lay ministry which reflects different gifts and talents.
- Develop the Parish Support Service in order to share the burden of administrative, safeguarding, financial, HR, governance and building matters in churches and LMPs.
- Improve the clarity and consistency of communication at all levels, with a trusted diocesan brand to emphasise our shared identity and commitment to each other.
- Create networks for different types of church (e.g. Local Mission Churches, Eco Churches), shared contexts, churches of different traditions and experiences, which offer support, partnership and sharing of ideas.



# NEXT STEPS

**These are ambitious proposals for our ten-year journey! What are the next steps which will help us achieve all that we aspire to do through *Time to Grow Together?***

## PLANNING & DELIVERY

*Time to Grow Together* will be led by a Programme Board, fully accountable to the Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees. There are some of the emerging areas of focus for our strategy across all three of our key priorities, which will be accompanied by detailed plans and costings:

| | |
|---|---|
| Leadership and formation | Key Mission Churches and growth infrastructure |
| Buildings aligned to mission | Digital, communications and identity |
| Data and insight capability | Rural strategy for Greater Lincolnshire |

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

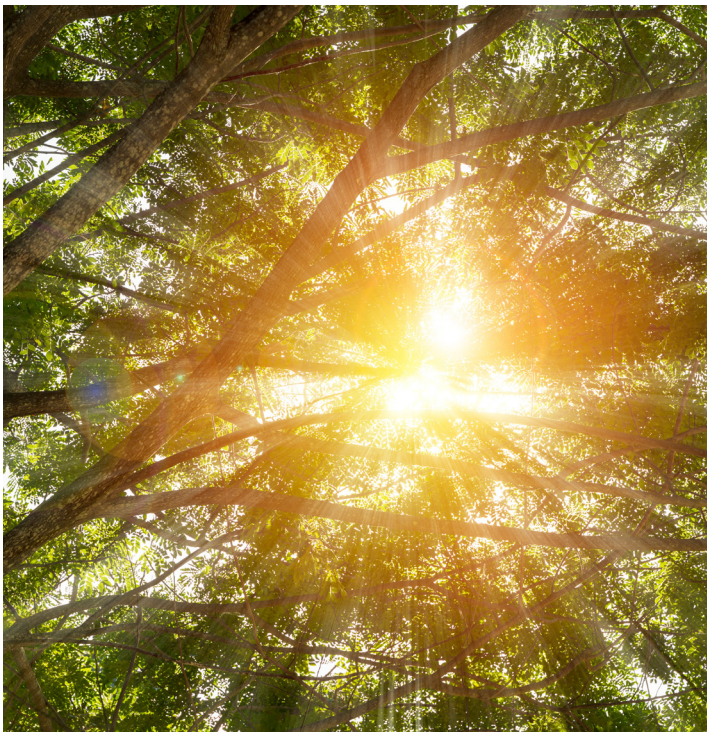
**These projects will help to prepare the ground for this ongoing work, including:**

- **RURAL GROWTH** – using capacity funding from the national Church, we will create a bespoke rural strategy for mission and growth in Greater Lincolnshire.
- **CHURCH PLANTING AND REVITALISATION** – many of our church plants and projects under *Resourcing the Urban Church* are in the early stages of development. We will ensure that this good work continues and explore new opportunities within LMPs.
- **CHARITY COMMISSION 2031** – by March 2031, all PCCs will need to be registered as charities. This will have a major impact on our governance and we will help parishes to prepare, including potential pastoral reorganisation where needed.
- **LMP PLANNING** – a target date will be set for all LMPs to agree on a Worship & Mission Plan in line with Key Priorities, with opportunities for regular review and development.
- **BRAND AND IDENTITY** – creating a clear visual identity for the Diocese of Lincoln will help to build a 'trusted brand' and foster a culture of belonging and shared commitment.

## LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY

**Our plans will have clear implications for capacity among church leaders and diocesan staff:**

- We will establish a minimum baseline and future targets for recruitment to stipendiary posts, e.g. to have 94 full-time clergy in LMPs by the end of 2026.
- Leadership Teams for the North and South (Bishops, Archdeacons, Area Deans and Lay Deans) will have clear role descriptions and key responsibility for implementing and embedding *Time to Grow Together* on the ground.
- Two new roles in 2026:
  - **HEAD OF GROWTH** – lead role for growth and Key Mission Churches, resourcing churches and leadership teams, challenge aspirations and build networks.
  - **WARDEN OF SPIRITUALITY AND WORSHIP** – lead role for enabling quality worship, spiritual development (including spiritual direction), and Christian formation





# MONEY

**We have outlined some serious challenges and exciting proposals for the next ten years. This work is only made possible through the good stewardship and generosity of God's people, through the investment of time, energy and resources.**

Through the **Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP)** the Church of England is supporting the growth and flourishing of churches across the country by committing considerable funding towards projects of all shapes and sizes. During these ten years, we will be applying for grants which will support some of the proposals of *Time to Grow Together*.

We have already benefitted from generous capacity funding from the national Church to help prepare the way, as well as our *Resourcing the Urban Church* project which received investment from the **Strategic Development Fund (SDF)**.

We are also in receipt of an annual grant known as **Lowest Income Communities Funding (LINC)** which provides for mission and ministry within areas of multiple deprivation. In many parts of the diocese, Linc Funding enables us to provide full-time stipendiary clergy in communities which could not otherwise afford to sustain ministry.

The growth we seek cannot depend solely on national funding. We seek to honour the investment of others with our own commitment and spirit of generosity. The Diocese of Lincoln is fortunate to have stewardship of historic assets, which our trustee body, the **Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees (BCDT)**, has pledged to use for proposals made as part of *Time to Grow Together*. BCDT will use fully costed plans to provide this level of investment.

We cannot sustain our common life and our aspirations for growth without the same investment from the people and churches of this diocese. Sacrificial, generous, Christian giving in the Diocese of Lincoln is among the lowest of the Church of England. It is an urgent priority for us to challenge the giving cultures in Greater Lincolnshire, sometimes exemplified as 'you get what you pay for' or 'someone else will provide.'

Let us be inspired by the Parable of the Sower, as we seek the growth of God's Church. The sower sows abundantly. We have received generously, so let us give generously in return, in order to gather in a generous harvest.

# WHO DO WE WANT TO BE?

**Where do we want to be at the end of *Time to Grow Together*? We will certainly need to review and reflect on what has worked and what hasn't. Perhaps the more important question is – 'who do we want to be at the end of *Time to Grow Together?'***

In recent years, we developed a set of Lincoln 'qualities' to describe the kind of ministers we want to recruit. Jesus reminds us that we will be known by our fruits (Matthew 7.20). Here is a renewed set Ten Qualities by which we hope the Diocese of Lincoln, our churches, people and ministers, will be known.

## HUMBLE

*Take up your cross and follow me (Matthew 16.24)*

Jesus teaches discipline and self-denial, rather than harm or neglect. Whom do we serve? Where is our focus? Where is the balance? Who are we listening to?

## PRAYERFUL

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5.16)*

Prayer is the basis of our shared life. What is our pattern of prayer, rooted and disciplined in the practice of the faith?

## CONFIDENT

*The one who calls you is faithful (1 Thessalonians 5.24)*

The Church as a whole is struggling with confidence – let us focus away from ourselves and point to him who calls us – we are confident, and we have a story to tell.

## COLLABORATIVE

*We are God's servants, working together (1 Corinthians 3.9)*

True collaboration is an attitude and an openness at the heart of Christian identity. Are we genuinely open and willing to work with and learn from others in one Body?

## RESILIENT

*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed (2 Corinthians 4.8)*

Resilience is knowing when to take risks, accept failure and try again. It is a learned quality that will help individuals, and the Church as a whole, to survive difficult times.

## MATURE

*We will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Romans 14.10)*

Mature in attitude; willing to respect difference. To find a way through polarising times: we study scripture together; we sit, talk and eat together; we pray together.

## CAPABLE

*Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received (1 Peter 4.10)*

To be reliable, recognising no one can do everything. The skills of mission and ministry can and should be learned. We can equip one another for all that we need.

## ADVENTUROUS

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4.7)*

We are seeking to proclaim our historic faith afresh in this generation. We are called to recognise the signs of the times and respond to them with creativity.

## PLAYFUL

*Our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy (Psalm 126.2)*

Godly playfulness is in recognising the joy of life, as well as its challenges. God gives life in abundance – let us delight in it as he does.

## MISSION-FOCUSED

*Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit (Luke 12.35)*

God is already at work in the world. We are a people who believe in God's activity, and we want to join in.

# CONCLUSION

**When Jesus explains the Parable of the Sower to his disciples, he tells them:**

***"As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."***

Our hope and prayer as God's people in Greater Lincolnshire is that we may be good soil in which the seeds of God's grace might be planted, and that in hearing his word, we will have the courage to follow him together and bear fruit in the service of his kingdom.

*Time to Grow Together* represents our direction of travel on this ten-year journey. It was adopted as our Diocesan Strategy by the Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees in September 2026 and we commend it to Diocesan Synod and to the people and places of our Diocese.

In every place, parish and partnership:

- let us be **energised by faith in Jesus**
- let us **reach out to our missing groups and generations**
- let us put **collaboration at the heart of our common life**

On this journey of faith, we place our hopes and aspirations into God's hands and ask for his blessing:

***O God,***
***enliven our faith,***
***give us hands to reach out,***
***and hearts to love and serve one another;***
***for the sake of your kingdom,***
***and the growth of your Church***
***in this diocese.***

***May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ***
***and the love of God***
***and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit***
***be with us all, evermore.***
***Amen.***



