

DIOCESAN PASTORAL STRATEGY

ST BENET BISCOP PARTNERSHIP  
SOUTH EAST NORTHUMBERLAND



To Parishioners of St Aidan's, Ashington and St Thomas of Canterbury, Longhorsley

**Final Submission to the Diocese of the St Benet Biscop Partnership**

Chair of the St Benet Biscop Partnership: Michael Quincey

Dean of the Partnership: Fr Peter Stott

Churches in the Partnership:

Our Lady and St Joseph, New Hartley

St Aidan, Ashington

St Bede, Bedlington

St John the Baptist, Annitsford

St Paul, Cramlington

St Robert of Newminster, Morpeth

St Thomas of Canterbury, Longhorsley

Parish of St Wilfrid & St Cuthbert, Blyth

(Our Lady and St Wilfrid, Blyth; St Cuthbert, Cowpen)

This document is the final submission forwarded to the Diocese on behalf of the St Benet Biscop Partnership and represents the culmination of many hours of discussion, thoughtful reflection, and careful deliberation. Throughout this discernment process, we have listened closely to parishioners' thoughtful contributions across the partnership.

**The next steps:**

The local community plans will then form Deanery level proposals into a Diocesan Strategic Pastoral Strategy - Winter 2026, with implementation - 2027 onwards.

We are committed to keeping you informed along the way. In the meantime, Fr Leo and Fr Gavino are available if you wish to discuss any aspect of this document. Alternatively, contact the parish office who will put you in touch with those involved in the partnership process.



| Area of Parish Life | Goal and Key Objective | How this serves our Mission | Concrete steps | When we hope to begin each step | What/Who will be needed | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| <b>E1 Worship</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| E1 Worship<br><br>Our priests are too stretched | Explore ways and develop the means to enable the communities continue to worship.                                                                  | Sustains the family of faith / consolidates discipleship and ensures the wellbeing of our priests. | Prepare our communities for the likelihood of change of mass times, amalgamation and closure of churches, noting the vulnerability of rural communities in our partnership and their sacramental needs. | Initially 1 - 3 years. | Good communications plan;<br>Sharing this document and any future process;<br>Regular prayer | Parish Partnership<br>Diocese                         |
| E1 Worship<br><br>Transport problems            | Ensure that all people wishing to attend services outside of their normal area are able to do so and support parishes in facilitating that access. | It continues to build the family of faith and community worship.                                   | Consider Sunday Mass times; weekday service times; sufficient lay leaders<br>good IT provision                                                                                                          |                        |                                                                                              |                                                       |
| E1 Worship<br><br>Volunteers                    | Strengthen the volunteer base<br>Support clergy and actively seek new volunteers.                                                                  | Missionary discipleship supporting the numbers of priests, builds up a sense of community;         | Identify, train, support and mentor willing and suitable volunteers;<br>Potential mutual support.                                                                                                       | 0 - 2 years            | Pro-active recruitment drive:<br>marketing, consequences, induction                          | Partnership Led with Diocesan Dept of Faith & Mission |

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| <b>E2 Teach</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| E2 Teach<br><br>Lay training, formation and leadership | <p>Develop &amp; expand lay leadership and formation.</p> <p>We need to encourage more young people, especially those between 11-18 years to interact with their churches.</p> | <p>This will enhance understanding, deepen faith and enrich participation.</p> <p>It would enable catechists and lay leaders to lead services, prayer groups and faith workshops.</p> <p>This will increase the number of people coming to church, enriching parish life and increased sustainability.</p> | <p>Identify people in the parish who are able to lead and engage with the programme.</p> <p>Working with the department of Formation and Mission to plan and deliver programmes.</p> <p>Priests (across the deanery) must commit to saying Mass at schools at least once a month.</p> | 0 - 3 years. | Liaison between schools and priests, governors and head teachers. | Deanery + Diocese. |
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| Area of Parish Life                           | Goal and Key Objective                                                  | How this serves our Mission                                                                                                                | Concrete steps                                                                                                                                                                       | When we hope to begin each step | What/Who will be needed                                                                                                   | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| E2 Teach<br><br>Reimagining Pastoral Councils | Strengthen governance and leadership within the parish and partnership. | Strengthen faith within a defined and locally driven liturgical framework.                                                                 | Define a mission statement and terms of reference for the Partnership<br><br>Engage in training for Pastoral Parish Councils.                                                        | 0-3 years                       | Priest identifies willing and capable volunteers                                                                          | Parish and Partnership led with support from the diocese     |
| E2 Volunteers                                 | Increase the number of active volunteers                                | Parish life continues seamlessly, even when current volunteers cease to serve.<br><br>It opens up new ways of engaging with the community. | Nurture current volunteers, encourage role sharing and keep talking to parishioners.<br><br>Advertise volunteering roles.<br><br>Encourage diocesan and parish drive for volunteers. | 0-3 years                       | Priests, current volunteers in order to support.<br><br>Diocesan training, eg lay leadership, eucharistic minister, OPAS. | Parish Priest and lay leaders and Diocese                    |
| E2 Finance                                    | Training for continuity.<br>Consider Parish Amalgamations.              | Increases sustainability                                                                                                                   | Explore training opportunities                                                                                                                                                       | Immediately                     | Finance groups                                                                                                            | Diocese & diocesan finance team; and Parishes.               |

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| <b>E3 Serve</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| E3 Serve<br>Priest workload             | Identify tasks that could be done by others to reduce the priest's workload | Allow focus on spiritual welfare rather than buildings maintenance and administration.                          | Allocate roles to members of PPC and other lay leaders within the parish. | 0-3 years   | Priest, PPC and lay leaders                                              | Parish and diocese |
| E3 Serve<br>Reduced priesthood domicile | Acknowledge the fact that there will be fewer priests.                      | Reimagines the use of buildings for the common good                                                             | Dependent on diocesan review.                                             | As and when | A decision from the diocese and then the pastoral council to take it up. | Diocese            |
| E3 Serve<br>Retired priests             | Care and support for retired priests                                        | Those priests will still have gifts they can share with the parish they are living in and strengthens ministry. | Diocese review use of presbyteries and liaise with affected parishes.     | As and when | Funds and support for the priest and the parish location.                | Diocese            |



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| E3 Serve Volunteers | Increase the number of active volunteers | <p>Parish life continues seamlessly, even when current volunteers cease to serve.</p> <p>It opens up new ways of engaging with the community.</p> <p>Discerning our Synodal Calling</p> | <p>Nurture current volunteers, encourage role sharing and keep talking to new parishioners.</p> <p>Advertise volunteering roles.</p> <p>Encourage diocesan and parish drive for volunteers.</p> | 0-3 years | <p>Priests, current volunteers in order to support.</p> <p>Diocesan training, eg lay leadership, eucharistic minister, OPAS.</p> | Parish Priest and lay leaders and Diocese |
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| <b>E4 Community</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| <p>E4 Community</p> <p>Sustaining bonds of community</p> <p>This Partnership is in an area of historic Christian heritage. It is a varied area of outlying rural villages and urban towns with diverse social status.</p> | To inspire and equip the local church to reach all people with the gospel, enable them as followers of Jesus, and mobilise them in God's mission | Catholic communities will continue to grow whilst no one is left behind. | Update of parishioner's recorded details & if necessary, organise a census. | 0 – 12 months | Diocese data collection advice. Parish councils will be required to assist and or admin volunteers. | Parishes Partnership Diocese |
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| Area of Parish Life                               | Goal and Key Objective                                             | How this serves our Mission                                                                                                                           | Concrete steps                                                                         | When we hope to begin each step | What/Who will be needed                                          | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| E4 Community Sustaining bonds of community cont'd | To bring local churches into a closer relationship.                | Aims to help us walk together with this shared framework.                                                                                             | Greater communication and Collaboration between ministries & Parishes                  | 0 – 18 months                   | Partnership, Parish Councils                                     | Partnership, Parish Councils                                 |
| E4 Community Sustaining bonds of community cont'd | To support local communities as determined by local circumstances. | Addresses the spiritual needs of local communities                                                                                                    | Develop Pastoral support groups                                                        | As necessary                    | Partnership, Parish Councils                                     | Partnership, Parish Councils                                 |
| E4 Community Sustaining bonds of community        | To continue pastoral care of nursing homes and housebound          | Addresses the needs of those unable to attend services. To avoid isolation and loneliness especially among elderly & those with mental health issues. | Develop and enrich Pastoral support groups                                             | 0 – 3 years then ongoing        | Partnership, Parish Councils                                     | Partnership, Parish Councils                                 |
| E4 Community Sustaining bonds of community        | To ensure that no one engages in possessive ministry.              | Enables shared responsibilities.                                                                                                                      | Skills audits, shared ministries across partnership training for lay leadership roles. | 6 months – 3 years then ongoing | Dedicated, volunteer base willing to serve in various ministries | Parishes Partnership Diocese                                 |

| Area of Parish Life                              | Goal and Key Objective                                                                    | How this serves our Mission                                                                                                                                                 | Concrete steps                                                   | When we hope to begin each step                            | What/Who will be needed             | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward  |
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| E4 Community<br>Transport difficulties           | Ensure that all people who wish to attend services and receive the sacraments can do so   | Enables continuation of faith and community worship                                                                                                                         | Car sharing and Supportive Lay ministries.                       | As soon as we know the outcome of the discernment process. | Willing & able volunteers.          | Parish Councils & Partnership.                                |
| <i>E4 Community<br/>Transport difficulties</i>   | To avoid parking problems causing neighbourhood tensions as well as accessibility issues. | Reduces conflict in neighbourhoods                                                                                                                                          | Voluntary Car-sharing<br><br>Check public transport availability | 0 -3 months then ongoing (due to changing Public services) | Parish Councils                     | Parish Councils                                               |
| E4 Community<br>School Partnership links         | Continue with existing links and work to develop stronger links wherever possible         | Families often disappear once the child's sacramental celebrations are over but this could become the beginning of a family's faith journey instead of the means to an end. | Develop relationships with school governors and head teachers.   | 0 -12 months then ongoing                                  | Partnership chair<br>Parish Priests | Partnership<br>Parish Priests & Parish Councils<br>Catechists |
| <i>E4 Community<br/>School Partnership links</i> | Continue with existing links and work to develop stronger links wherever possible         | Inclusion and formation ensures strengthening of links with church and families.                                                                                            | Encourage integration of school/church masses & services.        | Ongoing                                                    | Parish Priests                      | Partnership<br>Parish Priests & Parish Councils<br>Catechists |

| Area of Parish Life                          | Goal and Key Objective                                                            | How this serves our Mission                                   | Concrete steps                                                        | When we hope to begin each step | What/Who will be needed          | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| <i>E4 Community School Partnership links</i> | Continue with existing links and work to develop stronger links wherever possible | Embraces opportunity for young people to explore their faith. | Chair of Partnership to begin process by contacting secondary school. | 0 – 3 months                    | Partnership chair Parish Priests | Partnership chair. Parish Priests                            |

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| <b>F1 Stewardship</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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| F1 Stewardship<br>Finances for Mission                          | Ensure all parishes have sufficient funds to support the mission & to enable the introduction of new technology where appropriate. | Ensures spread of the Gospel and enables continuity of outreach. | Regular finance meetings providing transparent accounts.             | 1 – 3 years                | Volunteers or paid administrators to deal with finances & admin.                                            | Parish finance committees<br><br>Partnership |
| F1 Stewardship<br>Supporting isolated communities after closure | Enable & ensure IT possibilities are considered for ‘streamed’ Services and Masses for sick and housebound                         | Develops a renewed emphasis on outreach                          | People: well-formed and trained team skills in digital communication | 6 – 12 months then ongoing | Support for church leaders and teams who need bespoke guidance from diocese, Partnership & Parish councils. | Partnership Parish councils                  |

| Area of Parish Life                                                     | Goal and Key Objective                                                                                         | How this serves our Mission                                 | Concrete steps                                                                                                      | When we hope to begin each step                                      | What/Who will be needed | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| <i>F1 Stewardship<br/>Supporting isolated communities after closure</i> | Create & generate sufficient Pastoral support groups/networks                                                  | Ensures support for lay Ministries                          | Develop Pastoral support groups.<br><br>Hold Networking events for people in lay ministry roles to share experience | 6 – 12 months then ongoing                                           | Partnership & diocese   | Pastoral support groups.<br>Partnership                      |
| <i>F1 Stewardship<br/>Supporting isolated communities after closure</i> | Signposting to helpful resources.<br><br>Admin Hubs in the main locations to engage with isolated communities. | Enables communities to stay connected with wider community. | Develop Partnership working groups                                                                                  | 1 year then ongoing<br><br>i.e. When outcome of discernment is known | Partnership & diocese   | Partnership Diocese                                          |

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## F2 Stewardship

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| F2 Stewardship – Buildings for Mission | Identify where priests could be located For example in scenarios A,B C and D<br>(see Supplementary Table of Scenarios with fewer priests from Chris Myers) | Ensure there are Suitable Buildings to sustain sacramental provision | Identify which buildings are costing money now and in the future?<br><br>Which buildings could be put to alternative use? | Next 6 months – 1 year<br><br>1 -2 years | 1. Informed Decisions<br>2. Community acceptance<br>3. Cost implications | This has to be Diocese and Partnership led with PPC / Parish involvement |
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## F3 Stewardship

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| F3 Stewardship- People for Mission | Recruit and sustain numbers of Deacons, lay leaders, eucharistic ministers and altar servers<br><br>Increase non-sacramental volunteers | Missionary discipleship supporting the numbers of priests<br><br>Embedding community identity<br><br>Enables parishioners to access worship and prayer - formation of parishioners | Map provision across the Partnership<br><br>Mutual support possibilities?<br><br>Begin campaign on their importance<br><br>Identify, train, support and mentor willing and suitable volunteers | Next twelve months<br><br>In line with reduction of priesthood<br><br>Immediately | Pro-active recruitment drive: Vocations Promotion across diocese;<br><br>marketing induction<br><br>Volunteers, Trainers and mentors | Partnership led initiative OR Partnership driven inside a conscious Diocesan campaign ... ?<br><br>In-house across the Partnership<br><br>Parish + Diocese. |
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| Area of Parish Life                                     | Goal and Key Objective                                                                                                                                          | How this serves our Mission                                                         | Concrete steps                                                                                                                                                                          | When we hope to begin each step                         | What/Who will be needed                                                                                                                                    | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward              |
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| F3 Stewardship - Volunteers and succession              | <p>Promote Parish Groups, inc CWL, SVP, Catenians, Cafod, Justice and Peace, Live Simply, etc, etc</p> <p>Youth Groups</p> <p>Actively seek new volunteers.</p> | Parish life continues seamlessly, even when current volunteers cease to serve       | <p>Nurture current volunteers, encourage role sharing and keep talking to new parishioners.</p> <p>Advertise opportunities for volunteering.</p> <p>Provide training opportunities.</p> | 0 – 3 years                                             | <p>Enthusiasm and a willingness to continue to serve</p> <p>All people who are willing and able</p> <p>Increased information of any training available</p> | Partnership Leads, PPCs, Parish Priests,                                  |
| F3 Stewardship - Volunteers and succession              | Care for Creation                                                                                                                                               | Enables people to look outwards to wider environmental issues and their impact      | Promote and educate people in the values of Laudato Si                                                                                                                                  | Continuing                                              | Everyone is needed                                                                                                                                         | Partnership / Diocesan Environmental Group                                |
| F3 Stewardship - Reimagining Pastoral Councils training | <p>Review practice and protocols of the Partnership Council</p> <p>Reinforce Parish PPCs via Pastoral Council videos</p>                                        | <p>How does this service Mission?</p> <p>Provide discerning Pastoral Leadership</p> | Coordinate response to individual Parish needs for efficiency and support                                                                                                               | <p>0-6 months to organise</p> <p>6 months – 2 years</p> | <p>1. Expertise</p> <p>2. Joint Planning</p> <p>3. Parish and Communities buying</p> <p>4. Bespoke Training</p>                                            | Partnership led with Vicariate of Faith and Mission Support / Involvement |

| Area of Parish Life                                     | Goal and Key Objective                                   | How this serves our Mission                               | Concrete steps                                                                                                                                                                       | When we hope to begin each step                              | What/Who will be needed                                           | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| F3 Stewardship -<br>Lay Leadership, formal and informal | Attain sufficiency of sacramental and liturgical support | Reinforcing the family of faith<br><br>Build discipleship | Scope which churches need what<br><br>Establish a training programme<br><br>Explore parish cross-fertilization<br><br>Identify parishioners who could potentially undertake training | 3-12 months<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>1-3 years | Careful bespoke recruitment programme<br><br>Trainers and mentors | Partnership led / diocesan enabled                           |



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## F4 Stewardship

| F4 Stewardship – sustainability of Mission |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                |                                                                 |                                                                                                                            |
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| F4 Stewardship - Overstretched priests     | Free the priest so he can focus on Priestly Ministry (To reduce the workload)                                                           | To ensure the sacraments & spiritual guidance & support are their main role                                    | Review each priest's workload in order to meet key goal                                                                                                                        | Immediately                                                                    | Clergy and a small lead group from Partnership Committee        | Clergy and a small lead group from Partnership Committee with the support of PPCs                                          |
| F4 Stewardship - Volunteers                | Recruit and sustain numbers of Deacons, Lay leaders, Eucharistic Ministers and Altar Servers<br><br>Increase non-Sacramental Volunteers | Missionary Discipleship supporting Priesthood<br><br>Embedding community identity<br><br>Parishioner formation | Map provision across Partnership<br><br>Mutual Support Possibilities?<br><br>Begin campaign on their importance<br><br>Identify, train, support and mentor suitable volunteers | Next 12 months<br><br>In line with the reduction of priests<br><br>Immediately | Proactive recruitment drive: marketing, consequences, induction | Partnership led initiative, driven inside a conscious diocesan campaign<br><br><br><br><br><br>In-house across Partnership |

| Area of Parish Life       | Goal and Key Objective                                                                    | How this serves our Mission                                                                                     | Concrete steps                                                                                                                    | When we hope to begin each step | What/Who will be needed                                                                                                                     | Who will lead this and who we will work with to move forward |
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| F4 Stewardship Technology | <p>Harness the potential of IT and digital media</p> <p>Be bold, but tread carefully.</p> | Understand how technology could be used to help everyone survive the inevitable changes this Mission will bring | Compare and contrast use of technology across the Partnership & use examples from our churches to develop a 'new Technology plan' | Immediately and ongoing         | <p>Knowledge, Skills, Wisdom, Advice</p> <p>Funds to purchase equipment.</p> <p>IT literate volunteers to help delivery basic training.</p> | Partnership led / Diocese                                    |

### Diocesan Discernment Process: St Benet Biscop Partnership Consultation: Scenarios with less priests

| Church      | Location      | Resident Priests | Current Weekend Masses | Scenario A<br>4 priests | Possible Masses | Scenario B<br>3 priests | Possible Masses | Scenario C<br>2 priests | Possible Masses |
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| St Aidan    | Ashington     | 2                | 2                      | 1                       | 2               | 1                       | 2               |                         | 2               |
| St Bede     | Bedlington    |                  | 1                      |                         | 1               |                         | 1               |                         |                 |
| St Cuthbert | Blyth         |                  | 1                      |                         | 1               |                         |                 |                         |                 |
| St Wilfrid  | Blyth         | 1                | 2                      | 1                       | 2               | 1                       | 2               | 1                       | 2               |
| St Paul     | Cramlington   | 1                | 1                      | 1                       | 1               |                         |                 |                         |                 |
| St John     | Annitsford    |                  | 1                      |                         | 1               |                         | 1               |                         |                 |
| St Joseph   | New Hartley   | 1                | 1                      |                         | 1               |                         |                 |                         |                 |
| St Robert   | Morpeth       | 1                | 2                      | 1                       | 2               | 1                       | 2               | 1                       | 2               |
| St Thomas   | Longhorsley   |                  | 1                      |                         | 1               |                         | 1               |                         |                 |
|             | <b>Totals</b> | <b>6</b>         | <b>12</b>              | <b>4</b>                | <b>12</b>       | <b>3</b>                | <b>9</b>        | <b>2</b>                | <b>6</b>        |

#### Notes

- 1) The table above shows the current arrangements for Masses and resident priests in our Partnership – we currently have 6 priests sharing 12 weekend Masses. Of our 9 Churches, 3 have 2 weekend Masses, 6 have a single weekend Mass.
- 2) In scenario A the no of priests is reduced to 4 – there is still capacity to support weekend Masses at our 9 Churches as now.
- 3) In scenario B the no of priests is reduced to 3 – hence capacity for 9 weekend Masses. If St Aidan, St Wilfrid and St Robert retain their 2 Masses then only 3 Masses are possible at the remaining Churches – these Churches will either have to go on a rota for Mass or 3 Churches face closure. Clearly, difficult choices about closure of some Churches will have to be made in the medium term (5 years).
- 4) In scenario C the no of priests is reduced to 2 – hence capacity for only 6 weekend Masses. Under this scenario the no of Churches would be between 3-6, depending on whether those Churches having 2 weekend Masses could reduce to a single Mass. Hopefully, this scenario takes us beyond 10 years so hard to predict where we will be by then.
- 5) Hopefully this document is helpful in identifying the difficult options we face as the number of priests reduces.

**Chris Myers 28/05/2026**

