

LANCASTER PRIORY – PARISH PROFILE

Towards a Vision and Strategy

1. Why we need a Vision and Strategy

As we approach the process of finding a new Vicar for the Priory it is helpful to try to articulate how we understand our Christian faith and how that might work out in setting our priorities for the future. The absence of a Vision of this kind and our limited engagement with the Diocesan Vision 2026 have been identified as current weaknesses. Assessment of the state of the Parish using the Diocesan Healthy Church Audit Tool gives little ground for complacency. By developing a new Priory Vision we hope, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to build on our strengths and address our weaknesses.

At a purely practical level, developing a Vision at this stage will give a clearer understanding to potential candidates of how we see the Priory and its future. We shall be signaling that we are not waiting passively for a new incumbent to map out a path for us but are seeking someone who will help us along one that we have already identified. At the same time, it is important that the Diocese should perceive the Priory as a church which is engaging with the principles of Vision 2026, and that we can play a significant role in the north of the Diocese. Without that it is less likely that the Diocese will wish to invest to any extent in the mission of the Priory. We need to be seen as leading in faith to the people of Lancaster not just a place for weddings, funerals, baptism and civic occasions. We must beware of any tendency to a sense of entitlement because the Priory is a historic church with a civic role.

2. Developing a Vision

At the meeting of General Synod in November 2020 the Archbishop of York presented the paper [A vision for the Church of England in the 2020s | The Church of England](#) which was summarised as, ‘Christ centred and Jesus shaped. Simpler, humbler, bolder’. This is expanded as:

There needs to be a strong call to the renewal of our life in Christ: a renewal of prayer and worship; a biblical and theological renewal where we grow in intimacy with God, and overflow with the love of Christ, and are able to give reasons for the hope that is in us. Our first priority is to be a people of prayer, rooted in the revelation of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ, the one who died for us and rose again and who pours his Spirit into our hearts for our renewal and for the renewal of the earth.

Also:

In many provinces of the Anglican Communion this phrase, ‘Jesus shaped’, is used to describe the Christian life as a life shaped by the five marks of mission. They don’t just see these as marks of the mission of the church but as marks of discipleship, that is to see our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ as being shaped by the five marks of mission – a Jesus shaped life.

This vision is simply about recalling the Church of England to its primary vocation. It is not hard to see a direct relationship between the twin aims of Vision for the Church of England quoted above and Jesus’ summary of the Law:

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Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And ... Love your neighbour as yourself.¹

Our love for God is a response to God's love for us shown in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ². Love exists in a relationship. It is primarily a matter of the heart rather than the head. Our first priority is to be a Christ centred community that supports and encourages people as they grow in faith and respond in gratitude to the One who loves them.

The second commandment, which depends upon and flows from the first, is about our relationship with other people. We can only be effective witnesses, whether in word or action, to a relationship with God that is real for us³. Jesus provided for us the pattern of a life lived in the spirit of these two commandments which was much more important to him than the letter of the Law⁴. St Paul, who is often cited by those who want to lay down the law for Christian behavior, provided the gloss:

Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law⁵.

Living under grace, we are called to reflect the love of God in lives guided by the fundamental principles of the teaching of Jesus^{6,7}. We aim to be a Christian community in which our experience of the love of God flows out in loving service to others as described in the Five Marks of Mission:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (Tell)
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers (Teach)
- To respond to human need by loving service (Tend)
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation (Transform)
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth (Treasure)

3. Aims and Values

One of the strengths of the Priory is that it values mutual flourishing of the range of Christian traditions represented in the congregation that embody the Gospel principles described in the previous section. While only a minority would describe themselves as Anglo-Catholics there would be general assent to the values and aims of [Affirming Catholicism](#). These are:

We value

- *Regular prayer, study and worship to nurture personal growth and equip us to be Christ's apostles in the world.*
- *Commitment to the social and ethical transformation of the world.*
- *A living catholic tradition to carry the gifts of the past into the future.*
- *Models of love, friendship and community for all seeking to follow the gospel, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation.*
- *Diversity and freedom of conscience within the community of faith.*
- *Liturgy to inspire holiness and relate the greatness of God to people today.*

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We aim to

- *Resource people to grow in the faith, in order to help them respond to contemporary society's spiritual hunger and thirst for justice.*
- *Inform and influence debates in the Church by helping people to engage in the underlying theological issues.*

4. Strengths and weaknesses

The strengths and weaknesses of the Priory, identified in a previous document, have been amended in response to comments received.

4.1. Strengths

- **People:**
 - The faithful core congregation with extensive, though under-used, abilities including a large number of Associate Priests and Licensed Lay Ministers and dedicated and hard-working employees.
 - A welcoming culture of mutual flourishing and inclusiveness.
 - The large number of children involved in the choirs, as servers and in Young Church.
 - Active PCC groups engaged with prayer and spiritual growth, resources and Eco-Church, and world and community issues.
 - A wide range of groups active in the local community and for social interaction within the congregation.
- **Worship:**
 - The sacred space of a beautiful building, enhanced by the new lighting scheme, on a site where Christian worship has taken place for at least a thousand years.
 - Choral worship with a large robed choir, and an excellent organ, that attracts worshippers and supports the civic role of the Priory.
- **Music:**
 - The active Music Department which enhances worship, involves many children and young people.
 - Engagement with local schools.
 - The concert programme.

4.2. Weaknesses

- **Vision and leadership:**
 - Lack of an effective long-term vision and a Mission Action Plan.
 - Limited sharing of ministry and delegation of responsibility.
 - Limited engagement with the Diocesan Vision 2026.
 - Dependence on an aging core group.
- **Discipleship:**
 - Limited commitment by the wider congregation.
 - Lack of emphasis on, or provision for, growth in discipleship.
 - No provision for enquirers and poor retention of families.
 - Limited engagement with communities in the old and new Marsh.

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- Lack of coordinated pastoral care.
- Resources:
 - Income from all sources is not sufficient for growth in ministry.
 - The Priory Church whose maintenance is a constant burden and whose arrangement is inflexible with poor sightlines.
 - The number of car parking spaces close to the Priory set limits on the number of people who can attend services and concerts.
 - Lack of adequate space on site for vestries, administration, meetings, Young Church, and social interaction. Toilet facilities that are inadequate and inaccessible for ordinary use.
 - The Vicarage is damp, expensive to heat, inconveniently arranged, and poses security risks. It is located away from the centre of gravity of housing in the parish.
 - The Priory Hall is not ideally placed, is underused and in need of improvement.

5. A strategy for the Priory

The fundamental principles, values and aims, and strengths and weaknesses can be used to identify priorities for action that can be shaped into a Mission Action Plan. It is convenient to do this using the headings of Vision 2026.

5.1. Making Disciples

Many of the weaknesses identified suggest that our highest priority is to pay more attention to forming people as Christ centred disciples. We aspire to being a church that is growing in numbers and in the commitment of its members. We need to:

- a. Keep worship under review to ensure that the liturgy possesses a unity that inspires holiness, is accessible and intelligible to people of all ages, and draws them into the presence of God.
 - Choral Eucharist and Evensong continue to be central to our identity
 - The reception of the Family Eucharist has shown the need for less formal worship to complement the choral services.
 - We need to offer worship in other styles, on different days, and on the Marsh, to meet the needs of people in the parish who may not easily identify with the culture and location of the Priory.
- b. Promote spiritual growth by careful teaching about prayer, Bible study and worship. People need to be nurtured through pastoral support, mentoring, and spiritual direction as they grow in faith and encounter the challenges of life.
- c. Ensure that everyone who comes to the Priory feels welcomed, accepted, and valued as part of our community, and that their spiritual needs are met. People enquiring about the faith must be given opportunities to learn more about it.
- d. Find ways of building and supporting an online community of faith, which is part of the Priory community, based on streaming of our worship.

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5.2. Being Witnesses

The Priory is already engaged in activities that reach out to the local community. To encourage and strengthen our mission we need to:

- a. Place a high priority on our mission to the whole parish, especially the old and new Marsh, supporting the Priory Community Worker and working towards planting a new congregation on the Marsh for those who do not readily identify with the culture and location of the Priory.
- b. Provide encouragement and support for the people engaged in loving service to the local community through pastoral care, Mustard Seed, Olive Branch, and East Meets West.
- c. Build a sense of community, and reach out to new people, through existing activities and by developing new ones especially for young families, teenagers and young adults.
- d. Encourage and support the witness of those of our community who are active participants in secular organisations.
- e. Ensure that those who visit the Priory encounter it not just as a museum but as a sacred space that is at the centre of a living Christian community and establish a Gift Shop as a means of witness.

5.3. Growing Leaders

The Priory congregation includes many people with gifts and skills that can be used in our mission. However, many of these are over retirement age and those who are younger may have heavy work and family commitments. The Priory is of a size that is too big for the incumbent to do everything. It is essential that we bring others into leadership roles to allow the Vicar to fulfil the essential tasks of a parish priest while providing overall leadership, and effective oversight and support for delegated roles. We need to:

- a. Identify the gifts and skills that people have, encourage them to use them, and value that contribution.
- b. Identify younger people who can become leaders and support their development into roles.
- c. Identify and train people both for pastoral work and for supporting others in their spiritual growth as a matter of high priority and ensure that these people are adequately supported.

5.4. Children and Young People

The Priory is fortunate to engage with large numbers of children and young people through Young Church and through the work of the Music Department and the Servers, but this is constrained by lack of suitable spaces in the Priory. We need to:

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- a. Support the work of the Schools and Families Learning Officer by training others to work with her.
- b. Ensure that children and their families can engage with worship, are supported in home-based spirituality and continue with us as their children grow older. Children with special needs must feel included and be given the opportunity to develop.
- c. Find effective ways for teenagers, other than choristers and servers, to feel that they belong, can engage in worship, and are supported in their spiritual growth.

5.5. Resources

One consequence of our emphasis on Making Disciples should be an increase in the income from planned giving so that we no longer have to draw on reserves to cover normal running costs. Any additional income would allow us to strengthening our ministry and make essential changes in the buildings. In addition we need to:

- a. Find ways of increasing the space available to us. Relocating the Vicarage and adapting the present building for other uses seems the only realistic way of providing additional space in the short term. However, we should investigate at this stage what building developments might be possible in the long term when they could be afforded.
- b. Improve the scale and accessibility of the toilet facilities.
- c. Negotiate with the occupants of the Old Vicarage, and with the Castle, to see whether we can have access to more car parking spaces on Sunday mornings. The plan to create some additional spaces in the churchyard would not yield many extra spaces and is expected to face strong opposition. It is not clear that this is the best solution.
- d. Increase our income from tourism and events to assist with considerable expense of maintaining the Priory Church and allow income from planned giving to support growth in ministry. We should work closely with the Castle, and with Lancaster Museums, to ensure that the Priory is part of a well-planned tourist attraction. We need people who have the skills and time to do this recognizing that they do not have to be members of the Priory congregation.

6. Mission Action Plan

The tasks identified can be developed into a Mission Action Plan by determining priorities, by assigning people to take action, and by ensuring that everything is monitored and reviewed by the PCC on a regular basis.

¹ Matthew 22:37-39

² I John 4:9-10, Rom. 5:8

³ John 15:4-5

⁴ Matthew 22:40

⁵ Romans 13:10

⁶ II Corinthians 3:18

⁷ Matthew 5:14.