

Presidential Address July 2026

Without a vision the people perish. Proverbs 29, 18.

That may be one of the most misapplied sentences in the whole of the scriptures. Let's be clear, that Proverb has nothing to do with Diocesan Vision Statements. Nobody would have perished if we had not had Vision 2026. We live through faith in Jesus Christ alone who died and rose again to set us free and who calls us to live to his Kingdom now. The only vision that matters is the sight that enables us to see him and gaze upon his majesty for ever. Diocesan vision statements are only of any use if they point to him.

Which I hope that Vision 2026 has done. So as today we bid it a fond farewell, here are my top ten Vision 2026 highlights in no particular order.

One. A changed culture. The Diocese feels very different from 2015. Across traditions it is firmly focused on the priority of living the Christian life purposefully, declaring Jesus as Lord and expecting growth. And as our conference showed, there is an embedded atmosphere of joy, one which breaks down barriers of tradition and supports ministry in some of the toughest parishes in the country.

Two. Maintaining stipendiary clergy numbers. Many in the wider Church said we were crazy to make this commitment whilst running deficit budgets. But because of a culture of growth and because of heroic giving in our parishes we have been able to stick to that pledge. And whilst you could never say the DBF is awash with cash, we have not yet gone bankrupt!

Three. Two hundred new local congregations. The give it a go approach has had such an impact here. And whilst some are small and fragile and others have come and gone, it is a feature of our fastest growing churches that they have adopted a multi-congregation model

Four. The Diocesan Renewal Programme. Rather than re-organising an entire diocese in response to a deficit, we decided to offer relational, positive support to those parishes who most needed it. And we have seen remarkable levels of growth in Parishes who opt in to the DRP, so skilfully led by a dedicated team and making use of the Leading your Church into Growth approach.

Five. The Fruitful app and our Lent and Advent devotionals. The app is a cutting edge, innovative resource which gives easy and attractive access free of charge to excellent resources that support people to grow in prayer and in their love for the scriptures. And our excellent printed resources at Lent and Advent remain incredibly popular with over 10,000 of each distributed. These resources have got people thinking, praying and meeting with the Lord in his Word.

Six. External investment. The Diocesan Vision has made us, in the words of a member of the Church of England's Strategic Development Unit, an easy diocese to invest in. That

has led to the SDF1 project to develop urban leaders, SDF2 and 3 to fund resources churches in Preston, Blackburn and Blackpool, innovation funding for choir church and the transformative £25.5m Diocesan Investment Programme. Which has enabled us to fund more than 70 parish-based lay posts.

Seven. New lay leadership pathways. The highly popular Authorised Lay Ministry scheme is a result of the Lay Majority Framework which is a response to Vision 2026. And the cutting edge M:Power leadership programme that forms urban leaders has smashed all targets and changed many lives.

Eight. Recruitment. Relative to others we are blessed with a low clergy vacancy rate and have also been able to attract excellent colleagues to the DBF and DBE teams in recent years. A large part of the reason for this is the sense of purpose and direction given by Vision 2026.

Nine. Young people at the centre of our life. Our schools are the jewel in the crown of this Diocese and are now working even more hand in hand with our parishes and our Diocese. Our DBE team offer gold standard resources and support to our parishes and schools and the DIP programme is enabling the deployment of 30 Ignite Leaders. We have set up a Youth Forum so that the voice of young people can be better heard and we are seeing growing numbers of children and young people in our churches.

Ten. Prayer. A few weeks ago the Bishop's Budget Team were scratching our heads over future budget setting and were worrying about levels of reserves by 2030. Our Director of Finance, Ruth McGaughey, said, 'What we mustn't forget is that in this Diocese we set our budget on the basis of prayer.' Where else would the Director of Finance, usually the prophet of doom and decline, say that? In Vision 2026 and in our new Vision, we have tried to root everything in heartfelt prayer, knowing that it is God's church not ours.

Of course we have by no means achieved all we set out to when we launched Vision 2026. Though we have seen five consecutive years of growth, we are still numerically a smaller Diocese than we were in 2015. Nobody back then could have anticipated the Covid crisis with long term impacts that we are yet fully to understand. Though we are now seeing a recovery in vocations, our ordinand numbers vary wildly from year to year which makes clergy deployment a very hard thing to plan for. Developments in the wider church such as the LLF process and shocking safeguarding revelations have had local impact. Our vision for Whalley Abbey remains a work in progress. Our Cathedral has had some very bumpy years and I am grateful to the Interim Dean for the stability he is bringing. We should not boast, and anyway as Paul reminds us, if we want to do any boasting then all we should boast about is the Lord Jesus.

But we would be wrong not to give thanks for all that has happened under God in the eleven years of Vision 2026. And I especially want to record my thanks to Bishop Julian, now happily retired, whose energy and driving passion to share the Good News of the

Gospel was the inspiration behind this Vision. Many said that a vision statement that covered eleven years was crazy. He knew that change takes time, especially if you want to bring people with you. And the nationally led consultation process that followed his retirement showed him right because they remarked that they had never seen a Diocese with such a widely embedded and understood strategic vision.

So thank you to every one of you who, known or unknown, has contributed to Vision 2026. Thank you also to our senior team who have led it with such coherence and tenacity. The most exciting thing of all is that this Vision has brought people to faith in Jesus Christ who would not otherwise have come to know him. That must always remain our vision. For without him, the people perish.

DRAFT VISION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

(DS 3019)

**Carolyn Barton (Director of Vision Delivery & Deputy
Diocesan Secretary)**

Review of **VISION2026**

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Carolyn Barton
Director of Vision Delivery &
Deputy Diocesan Secretary

Widespread consultation including:

- Questionnaires to all parishes and schools
- Meetings with chaplaincies
- Youth Forum
- Bishop's Council
- Area Deans
- Independent voice from national Vision and Strategy consultant

....and more...

The report summarises consultation feedback:

- Main achievements under Vision 2026
- Things that didn't progress as planned or where there are things to learn
- A look at key datapoints
- Highlighting key themes to guide the planning of the new vision

The Rt Rev Philip North (Bishop of Blackburn) will move that:

“This Synod takes note of the Review of Vision 2026”

Synod is invited to make any comment, observation or point of clarification prior to voting on the 'Take Note' motion.

‘Joyful Followers of Jesus’ Delivery Roadmap

Carolyn Barton
Director of Vision Delivery &
Deputy Diocesan Secretary

In October 2025, Synod approved the following vision headlines:

Joyful Followers of Jesus

Seeing lives changed and communities filled with hope through:

- Knowing Jesus
- Loving our Neighbour
- Sharing our Faith
- Inspiring Young People
- Forming Christ-like Leaders

Today bringing the Vision Delivery Roadmap to Synod following:

- Consultation with Incumbents and Deanery Lay Chairs through the Autumn/Winter 2026 'MFF Conversations'
- Consultation and strand development at the January 2026 Area Deans' Residential, Bishop's Council & Headteachers/Incumbents Conference
- Subsequent development by the Strand Sponsors including wider voices (eg Inspiring Young People consultation with Youth Forum)

Launch of New Diocesan Vision:

Saturday 14th November 2026

at St Michael's CofE High School



Structure of Roadmap:

- 'Joyful Followers of Jesus'
- Elevating Levels of Prayer
- Vision Strands x 5
- Core Commitment: Safeguarding
- Wider Diocesan Family
- Link Dioceses
- Resourcing Mission and Ministry in Parishes
- Aspirations

- *Did the Vision and Strategy Team consider adding the word 'prayer' to the wording of the vision?*
- *Will there be a new brand?*
- *Will there be other ways to learn about the new vision other than this Roadmap?*

The Rt Rev Philip North (Bishop of Blackburn) will move that:

***This Synod approves the Vision
Delivery Roadmap for the new
diocesan vision: ‘Joyful Followers of
Jesus’***

*Synod is invited to debate the motion
prior to voting on it.*

DIOCESAN BUDGET

(DS 2023)

David Barlow (Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance)



2027 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION TO DIOCESAN SYNOD

David Barlow

Chair Blackburn Diocese Board of Finance Ltd.



STRATEGIC AND MISSIONAL CONTEXT FOR THE 2027 BUDGET



Vision-Driven Budgeting

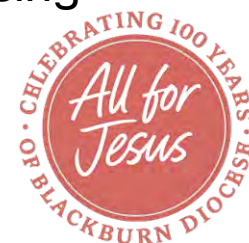
The 2027 budget aligns resources with the developing Diocese's vision of All For Jesus to support mission growth.

Financial Stewardship and Collaboration

The 2027 budget reflects collective responsibility between Parish and DBF, encouraging collaboration across the Diocese to serve Jesus effectively.

Contextual Challenges and Hope

The budget considers inflation and rising costs while remaining rooted in faith, hope and trust in God, and in our congregations.



KEY AREAS OF INVESTMENT

Targeted Mission Investment

The budget again prioritises investments in front line ministry including parish stipendiary ministry, youth ministry, lay pioneers, evangelists, and leadership development to support growth and mission.

Rising Stipend Costs

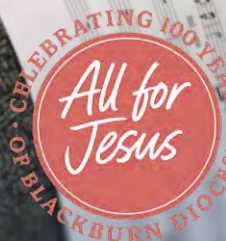
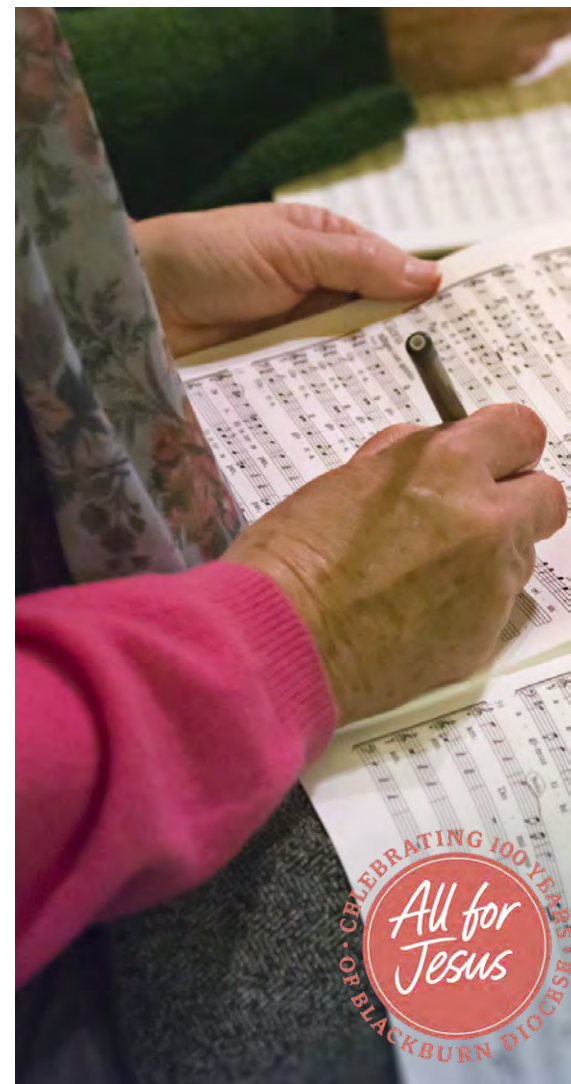
This requires an increase in stipend costs by £273,000 due to inflation and the funding of additional curates through diocesan investment program.

Housing Cost Increases

Housing costs for clergy have risen by £199,000 due to planned maintenance to ensure safe and more efficient clergy housing.

Balanced Financial Stewardship

The budget balances proactive investment on mission and vision with the management of essential costs.



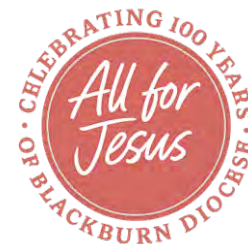


IMPACT OF DBF FINANCES

Parish Share Receipts will increase from £8.1 m to £8.3 million

Unrestricted (Free) Reserves will decrease by £442k

Anticipated significant deficit budgets for the next 3/5 years to keep Parish Share Requests as low as possible, using free reserves to make this possible.



PASTORAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND PRACTICAL RESPONSE FOR PARISHES



What parishes are encouraged to do



Give thanks



Pray for growth



Encourage generous giving



Seek support



CLOSING MESSAGE

Mission and Stewardship

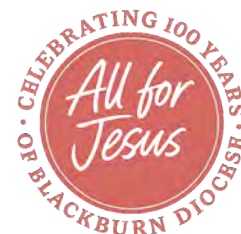
The budget supports mission priorities emphasising stewardship, growth, clergy support, and housing quality.

Financial Management

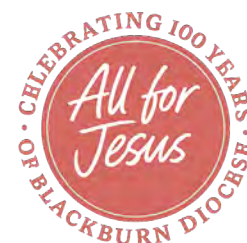
The 2027 budget is realistic and limits parish impact to a 1% share request increase recognising the cost pressures on parishes, particularly buildings.

Faith

The budget is all about faith, faith in God for His provision, faith in Jesus for His presence amongst us and faith in the Holy Spirit for His guidance, and also faith in our parishes and our congregations.



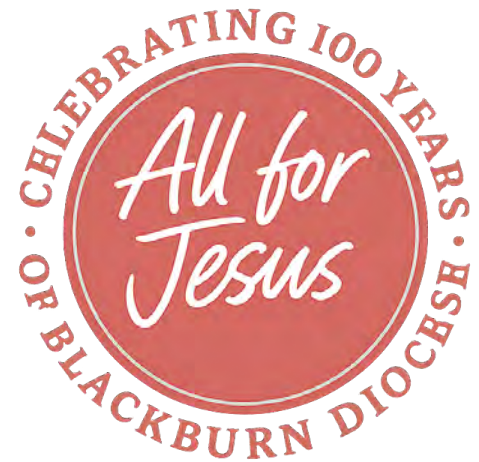
Thank
you!



RECOMMENDATION TO DIOCESAN SYNOD

Synod Motion DS 3023:

**This Synod accepts, the 2027
budget presented with
expenditure of £17,973,000.**



Diocesan Synod on 18 July 2026

Questions Received

From	To	Question	Response
James Lapping (Blackburn Deanery)	Bishop of Blackburn	Has the Diocese of Blackburn signed the Armed Forces Covenant (i.e Blackburn specifically), if not will we?	The General Synod of the Church of England voted to support the Armed Forces Covenant in July 2014 and it was formally signed by the Archbishops on behalf of the whole Church of England in February 2015. No motion has been brought to Diocesan Synod to sign the covenant over and above this national commitment, though a motion could be brought to Diocesan Synod through the Deanery Synod in accordance with the standing orders.