

Prayer

O Lord God,
when Thou givest to Thy servants to endeavour any great matter,
grant us also to know that it is not the beginning,
but the continuing of the same unto the end,
until it be thoroughly finished,
which yieldeth the true glory;
through Him who for the finishing of Thy work laid down His life,
our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Preamble

Welcome, and thank you all for coming this evening.

This meeting has been a long time in coming. One of the things I've been conscious of since arriving almost six months ago is how little you have heard directly from me. I haven't yet written a Dean's letter, and there has been relatively little from me in *Pepperpots* or through our other channels of communication.

That hasn't been for want of things to say. Indeed, an enormous amount has been happening, much of it behind the scenes, and we have been working towards a point where we can begin to share more openly something of what has been going on, and where we are heading.

I feel that we have now reached that point, and that a space has opened up for a fuller conversation. Tonight is a first step into that space. My hope is that what I share this evening will begin to fill in some of the gaps, offer a clearer picture of the work that has been taking place, and help us begin to look ahead together.

It is almost six months since my Installation as Dean of Southwell. I promised Chapter that, within three months, I would present a Vision and Strategy for the Minster for adoption or rejection, and I did just that. On 9th July, Chapter adopted that Vision and Strategy as its own.

So, what has happened over the past three months?

Well, rather a lot:

At the end of July, it looked as if the Cathedral was insolvent: that there was only just enough money to pay one more payroll.

That was no small thing, and I called an emergency meeting of Chapter for the following day. The meeting was scheduled to last two hours, but lasted 6 ½ hours, and this was followed by another two hours in which a Serious Incident Report was lodged with the Charity Commission and exchanges were had with the Church Commissioners – Chapter's two statutory regulators – and the Bishop's Office.

Our Chief Operating Officer and Chief Finance Officer spent the next six weeks going through the Cathedral's accounts with the finest of toothcombs. Those were six weeks very well spent, identifying how money had been spent over a number of years, how it should have been spent, and rebalancing the ledgers.

I knew that things were bad financially and interpersonally at the Minster before I was invited to become Dean; the fact that no accounts had been lodged with the Charity Commission for two years was testament to the former and, as the Independent Safeguarding Review Body, INEQE, has now reported, the interpersonal relationship culture at the minster had been "toxic".

Whilst an enormous amount of repair work had been done by Canon Neil Evans, the Interim Dean, on the people front, helped by the extraordinary Safeguarding catch-up work led by the Interim part-time Canon Missioner, Amanda Lees, no real work on the finances was possible until the new Chief Operating Officer had been joined by a new Chief Finance Officer.

The work done by Phil Morris and David Walker, has been transformative, but it has also been extremely costly in time and effort as their work laid bare the appalling state of the ledgers and the ways in which money had been received and spent over many years.

Where are we now?

Well, there is a new Chapter Vision and Strategy, but there is almost no money to enact much of it and, without major external intervention, the Minster clearly cannot continue as it is, something exhibited by the prodigious amount of water pouring in through cathedral roof, not just in the usual places, but through four bays of the Nave during Southwell Music Festival.

Following the performance, people had to leave the site through a pitch-black churchyard, because all the lighting on the north side of the cathedral had been condemned and there was no light.

I am still unable to appoint two Residentiary canons because there is no house fit to house anyone, let alone a family.

The Estate's Conservation/Structural Repair deficit stands somewhere north of £20 million and, as a result, all our so-called 'built assets' have now become 'liabilities'. No matter how much money we might spend on the buildings of the cathedral's estate, Chapter could never recover a penny of what must be spent.

Conversations are now taking place with the Church Commissioners, who not only provide the stipends (but not the housing) of the Dean and two Canons Residentiary, but who also provide some funding towards staff costs.

The Church Commissioners cannot, by law, provide money to support the care and maintenance of buildings, so, if our buildings are to remain in use, Chapter must seek funding from elsewhere, and this is likely to include the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other national grant-making bodies. But this is a medium- to long-term solution, not a quick fix.

If Chapter seeks external funding, and I can't see any other way to fund the level of repairs we need to carry out, it will probably take two or three years to be secured, and then only if we can finalise the 2025 accounts, and this will only be possible if we can sign off the Chapter's accounts as a "going concern".

If Chapter can do this, it hopes to be able to balance the Minster's books within three years.

Positively, a new provider, Massarella & Co, a longstanding family-owned Sheffield-based retail catering business founded in 1860, will supply our new food and catering offer in what was The Refectory, under the name "Etto at the Minster". Work is already underway to make the premises ready for an opening before the end of this month, and to make this possible, a temporary shop will open in the cathedral in just a week's time, until a more permanent Shop solution can be agreed.

There are now many cathedrals and major parish churches which have relocated their shops inside their cathedral buildings, and all have witnessed an increase in sales and donations from visitors as a result. I hope that this will be true of Southwell too.

The many years of not facing up to the reality of the Minster's increasingly dire finances have not only taken their toll but have now come to an end. Whilst I am Dean, there will be no more obfuscation, no more wishful thinking, no more putting off hard and painful decisions; I promise to tell it as it is – however difficult and uncomfortable that might be.

Things at the Minster cannot go on as they have gone on.

There is little to be gained by revisiting the errors of the past, however they have come about. There is no useful outcome that can be achieved by the retrospective apportioning of blame or through lamenting how things might have been done otherwise.

The past is another country, and we must all now pull together and concentrate all our energies and efforts on laying new secure foundations for the future.

With a new executive team, supported by new non-executive Chapter members, the Minster is in a new place. Chapter and its officers are committed to working tirelessly to secure the Minster's and the Cathedral's future.

So, help us God.

Immediate General Action

What Chapter is doing *now* to help stabilise the situation in which we find ourselves:

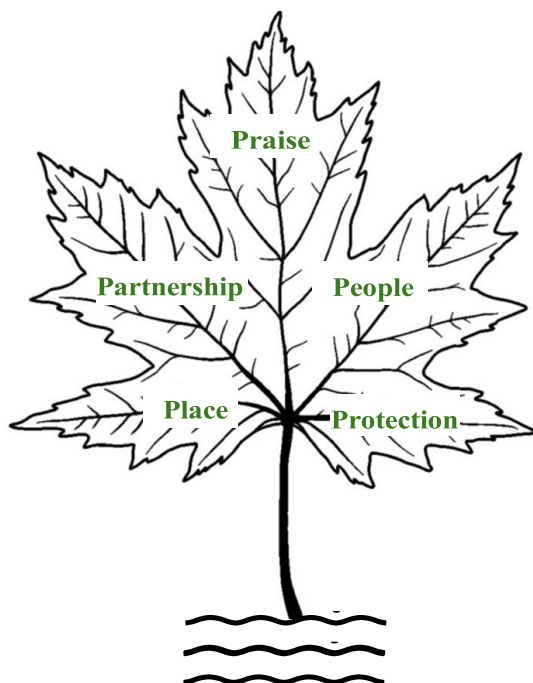
1. Already increased our Safeguarding provision to respond to the INEQE Report.
2. Begun conversations with the Church Commissioners and the Charity Commission.
3. In the process of replacing our Accounts systems to improve our day-to-day monitoring and produce real time Management Accounts.
4. Working more closely with our Auditors, including a forensic accountant.
5. Putting more Chapter training in place.
6. Lifting the level of professionalism across our teams by reviewing contracts and job descriptions, reviewing all our working and delivery, introducing new operating systems, providing more training and better supervision of employees.
7. Investing heavily in compliance, Health and Safety and safer working practices.
8. Taken out Service Level Agreements with HR, Employment, Ecclesiastical and Property lawyers.
9. Planning a new Stewardship campaign for 2027.
10. Started work on restoring 4 Vicars Court, carrying out more minor but long-overdue repairs to The Residence, planning to restore number 2.
11. Reviewing our natural estate, including tree work to remove dangerous trees and over-heavy tree canopies.
12. Planning to carry out minor repairs to Trebeck Hall.

Underpinning all this is the Vision and Strategy adopted by Chapter on 9th July.

Our Vision is: “to use our worship and resources to work with and alongside our colleagues and partners throughout the diocese and beyond to bring love, joy and hope, to make God’s love more real to all whom we encounter.”

We aim to achieve this by implementing our Vision and Strategy.

There are five key areas of work, just as there are five parts to many of Southwell’s leaves.



First, by offering the highest achievable standards of **Praise** to Almighty God with integrity and authenticity. This will include commissioning a wholesale external review of our music offer, including how we develop and utilise all the cathedral's choirs and musical resources. This will take place at the end of October, and members of the congregation will be invited to contribute to the review.

Second, by providing a place of sanctuary and **Protection** where everyone feels safe. This will include learning the hard lessons from the Cathedral's current legacy of safeguarding challenges, not only in terms of victims and perpetrators of abuse, but in terms of providing safe and suitable housing (Vicars' Court) for the residentiary canons and dean, as well as a safe workplace for all our employees, volunteers and visitors.

Third, by proclaiming the Gospel, making **People** welcome, exploring and explaining theology, coming alongside visitors, helping them leave as pilgrims. This will include restoring the Pilgrims' Chapel to daily use as a quiet, worshipping and reflective space and honouring the rich legacy of Sacrista Prebend by converting 5 Vicars' Court into a place of refuge, retreat, respite, pilgrim-welcome and spiritual exploration.

Fourth, by being a **Place** where we protect, celebrate and interpret our Built and Natural Environment. This will involve working towards becoming a "Green Cathedral", bringing together the work of the Southwell Minster Environmental Action Group, the Potwell Dyke Group, the Higgons' Mead Group, the Historic Archbishop's Palace, Vicars' Court and Bishops Manor as a single unit of concern, research and action so that we all might work together towards achieving *A Rocha* Gold accreditation for land and buildings.

Fifth, by developing active strategic **Partnerships** in the public, private, voluntary, community and cultural sectors such as working with Southwell Town Council to enhance Southwell's reputation as a spiritual, shopping, tourist, dining and leisure destination

How do we make this happen?

1. By establishing and working with a new Chapter Committee, to be called the "Vision and Strategy Implementation Committee".
2. By tasking the new committee with establishing robust methods of planning, implementing and evaluating the strategy in terms of what we do and when we do it, along with monitoring the cost/benefit outcomes of Chapter's proposed, ongoing and completed actions.
3. By producing a 'pithy' Executive Summary of our new Strategy & Vision.
4. By commending and holding our agreed Vision and Strategy to God in prayer and praying for gifts of discernment for all who will be involved in implementing the strategy.
5. By seeking the funding necessary to deliver the Strategy over the next quinquennium.
6. By commissioning a new Vision and Strategy communications plan (including a "brand/engagement plan") to help clarify our strategy's propositions and to assist in communicating, cascading and consulting with other stakeholders; helping everyone to recognise the fact that who and what we currently are is not, necessarily, who and what we will be.

Some practical notes in response to questions people have been asking:

Worship

The pattern of worship will remain as it is. Litany and Eucharist, 10 am Minster Eucharist and the monthly 11.15am High Mass (Cathedral Eucharist), Evensong at 3.30pm – but this is dependent on having the resources (both people and finances) to maintain such a pattern.

The 10am Eucharist will be modestly simplified, one hymn will be omitted, and the Lord's Prayer will return to its more traditional form. There will be a slight reordering of the 11.15am Eucharist.

Morning Prayer will remain unchanged; Evensong and Evening Prayer will be unchanged – but this is dependent on having the resources (both people and finances) to maintain such a pattern.

Some more thought is being given to Morning Prayer on Saturdays, including the possibility of a combined Morning Prayer/Eucharist as in other cathedrals.

Some Major Festivals and Feast Days will be moved to the nearest Sunday.

I hope that we will recruit a new Subdeacons, Intercessors and Readers to complement those who carry out these roles already.

The new 10am Minster Eucharist will begin on Advent Sunday. For environmental reasons, we will not have a weekly printed sheet for the 10am Eucharist but will return to a booklet which will be used throughout the year.

House Groups

I hope that everyone will, in time, be part of a revived network of House Groups. Not only will this ensure that there is good pastoral care, but there will be greater opportunity for fellowship and study.

New Bell

The Chimes Trust has agreed to add a new bell to the peal of bells, giving more opportunity for training and encouraging new ringers. This new bell will be baptised and hung in 2027.

Volunteers

I am deeply grateful to everyone who volunteers at the Minster. Our 300-plus volunteers make possible what would otherwise be impossible, and Vicky Thorpe's contribution is invaluable. I hope we can recruit many more people to support every aspect of Minster life, including the natural estate, churchyard, Potwell Dyke Grasslands and Higgons' Mead.

Chapter

The process for electing members of Chapter is rather opaque, tortuous and greatly misunderstood, so a few words, hopefully, to clarify things:

Membership lies in the hands of the Diocesan Bishop. The process is not a democratic one, and people are not elected but appointed. Names are sought. Potential candidates are interviewed by a nominations committee appointed by Chapter and once all candidates are interviewed by the Nominations Committee, the name of the candidate thought to be most suitable for appointment is sent to the Bishop for approval.

The Bishop is not obliged to agree with the recommendation of the Nominations Committee. If the Bishop agrees, the Bishop formally appoints the candidate to Chapter. Unsuccessful candidates for Chapter membership might be asked to sit on one of Chapter's committees, such as Finance or Audit and Risk. The current appointment to Chapter is subject to interviewing a candidate who has been out of the country for most of the summer. That interview is scheduled to take place this week.

I have said more than enough. Over to you ...

Questions followed and the meeting ended in prayer.

God of our yesterdays, our todays and our tomorrows,
help us by your grace to offer you worthy praise,
to protect the people, the built and natural environments entrusted to our care;
guide us, through the gentle leading of your Holy Spirit,
in proclaiming the Gospel,
and exploring the world in which we live;
and work with us,
as we seek to build and sustain creative partnerships
with those with whom we meet;
and all these things we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who taught us when we pray to say:

Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.

The Very Revd Dr Stephen Evans
Dean of Southwell