

How can we help our churches grow?



The Rev Andrew Axon, our diocese's Lead for Revitalise, outlines how we can enlarge our congregations and deepen discipleship

I HAVE the privilege of being Lead for Revitalise in our diocese – in other words being responsible for helping our churches with their mission and evangelism. That means encouraging growth in numbers, but also depth of discipleship.

Having been ordained for almost 25 years, this is my fourth diocese, and I am loving the opportunities this role provides.

We have a great team working at Peninsular House and across the parishes and chaplaincies. I want to offer three brief observations from undertaking this work.

The first is the importance of churches having vision for growth. You would expect me to say that as the lead for church growth, but it is true.

One of the key tasks I have is to support parish clergy, ministry teams and PCC members as they seek to discern what God might be calling out of them in the coming years. These plans require prayer and holy listening, valuable time spent looking again at our church life and the communities we serve.

Recently, I supported a parish with no experience of doing this vision planning. They were nervously excited to see what might happen, but keen to unite around this vision

and see growth in their church family.

With a renewed sense of purpose their 'revitalise plan' was created, and the clergy and PCC are now working hard on three mission aims for the coming three years. If we can help your church to plan for growth, then please get in contact.

One joy is working with churches to nurture healthy ministry teams

The second is the importance of a healthy team. For too long churches have relied heavily on clergy to deliver most aspects of parish life.

This is not only contrary to the Biblical narrative but squashes the gifts and talents of all God's people. From baptism we are all called to live out our faith as Jesus-centred, kingdom-seeking disciples.

One of the great joys in my role is working with local churches to help nurture healthy ministry teams that are active in mission and share the role of overseeing mission and discipleship together.

In that context new vocations are discerned and discovered. Clergy

are supported in living out their calling as lay ministers and all God's people work together in love and unity.

Members of our diocese's Ministry and Discipleship team are well equipped to offer bespoke support to your parish. If we can help please let us know.

The third observation is the need for leadership in our churches that leads in the work of casting vision and unites the church members.

In addition to those tasks, we see God raising up leaders to bring hope, encouragement and break new ground as the Spirit of God leads. That is: church leaders who have big faith in a generous God, ministering from a place of love, with a clear sense of their own role to play in the life of the church.

Within this diocese, I have seen many of those leaders in our churches and I am excited for our shared future. There is much to celebrate in what we see happening already,

I have deep faith that many of our churches will come to deeper revitalisation in the coming years as leaders are mobilised and equipped across the diocese. I am hugely thankful to partner with you in this work. For more details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/Revitalise