

Strategy aims to help us impact spiritually

OUR diocese aims to launch an ambitious multi-million pound project to help the work of the Church of England have a bigger spiritual impact in this region.

It wants to invest £9.65m into parishes over the next five years to stimulate spiritual and numerical growth and to help worshippers to engage better with their local communities. It's hoped more than half of this money will come from the national Church.

The plans are part of the diocese's **live | pray | serve** strategy which aims to make new disciples, to grow our church communities, to equip worshippers for lifelong learning, and to help to transform our society.

The strategy includes the creation of multiple new congregations and working in brand new ways to serve those who we have traditionally been poor at engaging with – younger people, those in urban areas, and people on new housing developments. It involves both planting new churches and a network of pioneer ministers who can think in innovative ways.

The latest strand of that strategy involves reorganising some of our parishes in order to free up some resources and is based on similar transformation models elsewhere in the Church of England. Although the plans were initially announced as costing £9.1m, recent liaison with the national Church has prompted us to consider investing even more cash from the diocese's reserves to ensure its success.

Parishes in the urban areas of



St Margaret's Church celebrated its first birthday with a service at which its leader, Fran Carabott, was licensed. It has grown from 15 to around 70 people

Havant, Gosport and the Isle of Wight have been identified as places where renewed investment could have the maximum impact – for instance, where a one per cent increase in the percentage of people in those areas who go to church equates to 200-300 new worshippers. The idea is to redeploy people, finances and buildings, so that God can use them in new ways.

If approved, our 'Resourcing Growth' project could include creating the infrastructure to support the growing, new congregations at Harbour Church and St Margaret's Church in Eastney, both of which have outgrown existing resources since their creation in 2016 and 2017 respectively. We could also recruit new pioneer ministers to work in inner-city **Portsmouth**. We're applying for funding for this part of the project and could hear before Christmas if our bid has been successful.

In **Havant**, it could involve investing £1.4m into our ministry to the Leigh Park estates, around double what we currently spend. It should mean increasing the staffing levels, with a mix of clergy, pioneering and operations staff, and updating church buildings. And it could mean merging the three existing parishes of Leigh Park, Warren Park and West Leigh to become one parish.

On the **Isle of Wight**, we could invest £1.5m over the next five years into our ministry in Newport and increase the number of staff, including a mix of clergy and lay people. It could mean merging the four existing parishes in Newport to become one parish – with the rural part of the parish of Carisbrooke merged with Arreton, Newchurch and Gatcombe.

And in **Gosport**, we could invest £1.9m over the next five years, increasing the number of staff,

Musician will start new church

THE musician who hopes to create a brand new congregation by starting a church choir has been appointed.

Alastair Ross aims to lead a new choir of children and young people in the Milton area of Portsmouth – with a brief to create a vibrant church plant of younger families.

He is scheduled to start this new role in December, and will work alongside primary schools in the area to set up the choir.

Then he'll aim for the parents of those children to join them for regular worship services, forming a new congregation within the

parish of St James, Milton.

Alastair (pictured right) is a former member of choirs at York Minster, Canterbury Cathedral and St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh.

He also spent several years singing regularly with the choirs of Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral, as a freelance singer on the London circuit.

He said: "Singing can instil enthusiasm in anyone. To be able to share and nurture this concept with schoolchildren in a setting such as this is a dream role for me and one I cannot wait to get started in."



This choir church is one of several brand new congregations being launched across the diocese as part of our live | pray | serve strategy.

planting new churches, and maximising community use of church buildings. It could mean merging the parishes of Rowner and Bridgemary; and merging the parishes of Elson, Forton, Christ Church and Holy Trinity.

It is hoped the project will be funded over the next five years by £3.75m in reallocation of existing resources, up to £1m from diocesan reserves and £4.9m from the national Church. The diocese is applying for this £4.9m from the Church Commissioners, as part of their national Renewal and Reform programme.

Bishop Christopher said: "We are aware of the faithful, committed work of many of our clergy and parishes over decades and centuries, and thank God for it. We also understand the uncertainty and anxiety these changes may cause. Equally, we know our church services, activities and events are often only reaching a small percentage of the local community and we need to find better ways to reach the vast majority of people living in these places.

"Our experience with a variety of church plants and pioneering ministers is that innovative

approaches do work. Brand new congregations are flourishing and pioneer ministers have found ways to bring the gospel to those who might never attend a church service. This project aims to expand that work, partly by reallocating resources, and partly with significant new investment.

'We need to find better ways to reach the vast majority of people'

"We hope this will make a significant difference to the spiritual impact that the Church can make – creating new congregations and making new disciples. And having greater numbers of committed Christians in our parishes means there will be more volunteers to serve the local community more effectively."

We have held three public meetings to discuss the plans with those in the affected parishes. The period of consultation will continue for six months before our Bishop's Council is asked to approve specific plans to reorganise parishes. The final decision is taken by the Church

Commissioners.

The Rev Carrie Thompson, vicar of St John's Church, Forton, said: "I hope that the new investment and a more collaborative structure will free us from some of the burdens of maintenance of our buildings and administration, and allow us to work more creatively across the whole town.

"We know that while traditional models of Church are deeply important and loved by those who attend, others can find them alienating. We hope that the extra resources will allow us to work with local people to create more new ways of being Church which resonate with them.

"At present, we are not convinced that the particular structures being proposed are quite right for Gosport, but we know that this is just the beginning of the consultation process. We hope and trust that the diocese will listen to the views and experience of local people, and that together we can work out a model which will enable the whole Church in Gosport to flourish and grow."

For more details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/strategy