

# Our pews are filling with new believers

CHURCH attendance across our diocese is increasing – and our figures are among the most encouraging across the whole of the Church of England.

More people are committing themselves to faith in places where we have invested strategic funding. And what’s also fascinating is that God is also working in places where no such funding has been available. Various churches have reported people walking unprompted into church to find out more – what has been termed the ‘Quiet Revival’.

The number of adults attending our churches each week rose by 3.3 per cent in 2025, compared to the average national increase of 0.7 per cent. And the number of children attending was up by 7.4 per cent – our diocese has the third highest increase of all Church of England dioceses.

Attendance at Easter 2025 was 11 per cent higher than in 2024. And incredibly, the number of people coming to our churches in Advent was up by almost 38 per cent – the largest increase of any diocese. And this growth appears to be happening regardless of church tradition or style of worship.

The standout news comes from Fareham deanery, where almost every single parish recorded an increase in both church attendance and baptism of new believers from 2024 to 2025. None of these parishes are using strategic funding, so this may be an example of effective parish ministry coupled with God’s Spirit moving.



New believers enjoy a meal together at St Mary’s Church, Portchester

There are also encouraging signs of growth in many of the churches where strategic funding is in place, including in Ryde, Newport, the Haven Church in Gosport, Bridgemary and Elson, Harbour Church, and St Michael’s, Paulsgrove. Adult baptisms are also on the increase across the diocese. The figures come from data collected last year.

Strategic projects manager Tim Pike said; “First of all, we want to thank parishes that took the time to respond – there was a 93 per cent response rate. And what the data shows is that where parishes are innovating and offering new opportunities for worship and fellowship, then people do come.

“It is happening across all church traditions, but the real growth is in parishes engaging in work with children, and where there is a clear pathway for adults and children to become disciples, not just churchgoers.

“The example of Fareham deanery shows what can be achieved without strategic funding. These are parishes that just have mission in their DNA – and it shows. In this deanery, baptisms are still increasing as new people come to faith, while they are dropping elsewhere.

“And the data also shows that the biggest threat to growth is a vacancy. Our diocese has done a lot to shorten the length of time that a parish is without a vicar or rector, and the data justifies that focus. A decrease always seems to happen when a parish is between clergy.”

Analysing this data is important, as it helps us to know if we are investing strategic funding in the right places. The funding is based on our diocesan strategy, which includes plans to Revive lay and clergy leadership across our diocese, Revitalise our churches so they can be effective in mission, and Renew the Church by planting new

## Social media brought me to faith

WILL Limburn would say he came to faith via a combination of Instagram, TikTok and the Bible app. No other person was involved.

It all sounds very modern. But it amounts to God working through contemporary media to reach someone searching for purpose.

The 19-year-old ended 2023 struggling with anxiety and some compulsive behaviour. He felt he had nowhere to turn. But he saw an Instagram Reel about Jesus and suddenly Christian things kept popping up on his social media.

In May 2024, he began watching a Bible study on TikTok where an American Christian influencer was uploading a reflection on a ‘verse of the day’ every night. He spent six months analysing those studies, began praying more – and then downloaded the Bible app.

After two months of putting it off, he walked into St Faith’s Church, Lee-on-the-Solent, on the first Sunday of 2025. And he’s kept going there ever since.

“I had felt a bit stuck in 2023/24, as I had been struggling for a while,” he said. “But when I saw this first video about Jesus, I was hooked. It was as if Jesus was following me around my social media feed and I couldn’t run away.

“I spent six months watching Madeline Grace from the USA



Will Limburn, 19, who found Jesus initially via Instagram

each night. I took notes, learnt about the Bible and was writing a journal with my thoughts. It was only when she took a break from uploading them that I downloaded the Bible app and realised that I could reflect on Bible verses myself.

“None of my family are Christians, so it took some effort to go to church. But when I did, I met Paul the vicar, and we’ve now met a few times for coffee and a chat. There’s actually around 10 of us young adults who are now part of the church, and

we meet every Wednesday night. “Faith has affected my life more than I ever imagined. It has changed my view of the world, every decision I make, the way I speak and act. Your heart changes and you want to treat people in a different way.”

Will had been at university until March 2025, then worked as a caretaker before taking up his current role in the customer service team at Paultons Park theme park. He has joined the PA team at St Faith’s and helps the church to broadcast on Youtube.

congregations in areas where there is little presence at the moment.

Among our strategic plans have been bringing clergy and lay leaders together in Cairns to pray, eat and study together; inspiring churches to create pathways to discipleship; brand new congregations in places such as Ryde, Paulsgrove and Gosport; projects to create worshipping communities via Choir Church and Flourish initiatives; and a new emphasis on training in work with children and young people.

But away from those strategic plans, God has also brought groups of people into church, asking for Bibles or wanting to know more about faith. In **St Mary’s Church,**

**Portchester,** around a dozen younger men have arrived in church over the past two years, eager to embrace faith. The church has hosted discussion groups and meals for them.

At **St John’s, Locks Heath,** three people were baptised at Easter after arriving in church with no background of faith. There were another six people baptised on Easter Sunday at **Hope Church, Whiteley.** And in the churches at **Clanfield and Catherington,** people have picked up Bibles that were being given away for free and become involved in church too.

The Rev Andrew Hargreaves, our director of Ministry and Discipleship, said: “Of course, we don’t measure

effective mission and ministry just by looking at the numbers. But when the overarching narrative is about the decline of the Church, it is worth celebrating statistics that seem to show a turning-point in the life of our diocese.

“God is present in the detailed work to analyse where to place resources and how our churches can grow in numbers and in depth of discipleship.

“And it also appears that he is working in other places, entirely independently of our efforts – by bringing people into church unexpectedly. All we ask is that our churches are ready and willing to react to what God’s Spirit is already doing.”