

Our strategy for rejuvenation

DIOCESAN VISION AND
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

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ABOUT OUR DIOCESE

The Diocese of Portsmouth covers south-east Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. It has a population of 788,000, and embraces a wide range of geography and demographics, from village parishes within the South Downs National Park, to the urban heart of Portsmouth and Gosport; from the suburban communities around Fareham to the Victorian seaside towns of the Isle of Wight. It is a small diocese within the Church of England, but regularly 'punches above its weight' in the national Church.

There is an enormous variation in levels of deprivation between different parts of the diocese. There is also a real physical barrier between the Isle of Wight and the mainland, with ferry timetables, cost, and the weather making a significant difference to how, practically, we are able to work together across the diocese.

We have around 70 stipendiary clergy ministering to approximately 8,000 worshippers, alongside a variety of self-supporting clergy, active retired clergy, Readers, Anna Chaplains and lay ministers. We also have 38 church schools and five church academies in the diocese, which represent a potential for us to do 'church' in new ways.

Attendance statistics show that approximately one per cent of the population go to church. In other words, 99 per cent of people do not attend church regularly. Moreover, there are relatively few members of our congregations under the age of 50, and very few young people and children. Only 11 churches from our 129 parishes have more than 25 under-16s in their services.

OUR FIVE CHALLENGES AND HOW WE'RE MEETING THEM

Our biggest challenge is the need to grow in confidence in the gospel to produce thriving churches full of children and young people. This will enable new generations to enjoy a life-transforming encounter and relationship with Jesus – alongside those of an older generation who are treasured and whose experience is vital. Addressing this challenge will help us to address the other key challenges we face:

1. LACK OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The overall attendance of under-16s at churches across the diocese is around 875 children, 0.6% of the child population. This is alarmingly low overall, and in 2022 more than a quarter of our parishes reported no children in their congregations.

Archdeaconry	Population	Attendance per Capita	u16 Attendance per Capita
Portsdown	369,000	0.8%	0.5%
Meon	277,000	1.2%	0.8%
Isle of Wight	142,000	1.1%	0.4%
Total	788,000	1.0%	0.6%

Some areas of significant national church investment have yielded thriving ministries, for example:

- **Harbour Church, Portsmouth**, with worship services reaching around 100 young people each week as well as 54 under-16s;

- **Haven Church, Gosport**, (including Christ Church) which has a children and family focus, and around 65 children and young people attending each week;
- **St Margaret's, Southsea**, which has a range of services, including one based around soft play, and around 45 children and young people each week.

Other churches have fruitfully sustained and grown their children's work by choosing to prioritise it at local level, with Sunday morning groups, Messy Church, holiday clubs and toddler groups.

Some pooled their youthwork resources to create High Tide, allowing teenagers from church youth groups to meet monthly for youth services, and to go on annual activity holidays.

And we've taken up national C of E opportunities to run 'Chatting Faith', an initiative to equip parents, teachers and children to discuss matters of faith across six parishes; and also to pilot new Flourish worshipping communities, based in four C of E schools and supported by local parishes.

But to halt the overall decline and move to growth, we need to alter our priority and approach to mission, while preserving our core vision and message.

2. DECLINING ATTENDANCES

The graph below shows that average weekly attendance has been declining over recent years, from 12,600 in 2010 to 8,000 in 2022 – a drop of 36 per cent.

Declining church attendances not only mean that fewer people are able to worship God and experience Christian community. It also diminishes our ability to respond to the needs of those around us.



One of the craziest churches in our diocese

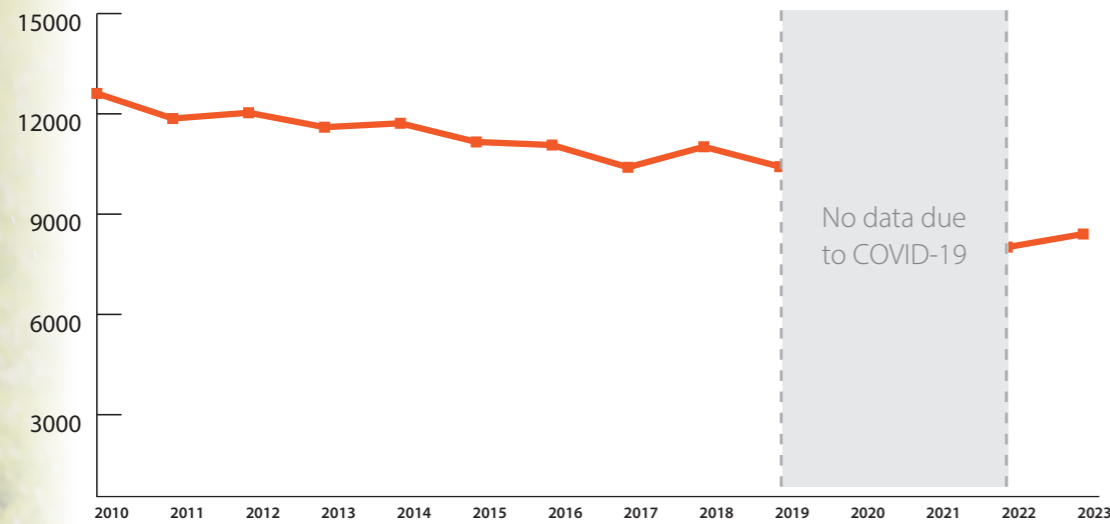
That was the verdict on 'The Four', the innovative, high-octane family service at Christ Church, Gosport, which mixes energetic worship with craft, games and a sit-down meal. Dozens of families queue up outside before the doors open at 4pm and walk in through a stream of bubbles.

Kyle and Courtney Gray bring their niece Isabella to Christ Church as often as they can, and have been part of the congregation for two years.

"Our lives have been totally transformed by this church," said Kyle. "I came from a background that's not religious, but I felt really welcomed here and it's had a huge impact on me."



Portsmouth Diocese – Average Weekly Attendance by Year



Over the past seven years we have been actively investing in and learning from major initiatives to stimulate church growth, including:

- **Church planting:** Harbour Church, a church plant from the stable of Holy Trinity Brompton, was launched in 2016 with just 20 people who moved from St Peter’s, Brighton. It now has congregations at its three services of around 450, with many children, families and young adults. It has planted further churches in Gosport, Torbay and Cardiff.
- **Church revitalisation:** In 2017, a small group started meeting in St Margaret’s, Southsea, a building that had been closed for worship two years beforehand. They started a range of community activities, including a community shop, café and Pantry. It now has 155 people attending worship with countless more using the building during the week.
- **Collaborative ministry:** reorganising parishes in areas such as Gosport and Ryde was the springboard for new teams of clergy and lay leaders to create brand new worshipping communities alongside existing traditional worship. In Ryde, the planting of a new contemporary congregation in All Saints Church is the first step in a strategic approach to revitalisation across the Isle of Wight.

However, it is clear that additional work is needed to revitalise existing congregations and to create new worshipping communities of all types.

3. UNFIT BUILDINGS FOR MISSION

Our church buildings are often expensive to maintain and are not flexible enough to support the range of worship and community activity necessary to support a thriving, mixed ecology ministry of formal and informal, liturgical and extempore, amplified and acoustic services. Buildings are not always in the right place to serve the current population.

Some of the strategic funding allocated by the national Church of England has been spent on making buildings more suitable for a wider range of worship and service to the community. For instance, St Margaret’s Church, Southsea, was equipped with a café and a soft play area inside the church.

The completion of a major refurbishment of Newport Minster in 2024 involved a complete reshaping of the inside of the building, with new meeting rooms and facilities so it can become a magnet for community groups. It is now fit to be a springboard for mission in the area.

Where parishes have come together in pastoral re-organisation, we’ve created spaces suitable for each church’s area of emphasis. For instance, for Haven Church in Gosport, one church is equipped for contemporary worship, another retains a traditional layout for Anglo-Catholic worship, while the third is set up as a centre for youth mission.

We’ve put in place a buildings officer for the Isle of Wight to assist struggling parishes to define their required works and apply for grants. However, more work is needed to revitalise our existing buildings.



IT’S quite natural to talk through the big issues of life over a pint in the pub. So it makes sense that Harbour Church in Portsmouth holds an Alpha Course there.

Those who come to sessions are welcomed with free pizza, fries and a drink. They watch the Alpha video and split into smaller discussion groups. Harbour Church holds one of its regular Alpha Courses in the pub each year with a particular focus on students.

Johan Kool, 19, said: “It’s been helpful as I’ve always had reservations about faith. It’s great to meet people who are open-minded and to speak about some of the fundamentals, as you don’t always have time in normal life.”

4. STRETCHED CLERGY AND STAFF

Our parish stipendiary leadership is stretched, following an extended pause on recruitment running up to 2022. We currently have 64.2 full-time-equivalent incumbents and 14.5 curates (ending in Aug 2024) ministering to 129 parishes with 168 church buildings. This is almost one stipendiary clergy person per two parishes and 12,000 population. We are budgeting to have 75 stipendiary clergy in 2025, which would mean that every single post is filled.

Centralised support staff are also stretched following a period of cuts rather than planning for growth.

Our focus since March 2022 has been on:

- developing a diocesan leadership team that prays for each other, explores God's word together, eats together, laughs together; and sees its role as under-standing (ie serving and supporting). It serves the life of each and every one of our communities, being transparent, responsive, collaborative and accountable;
- recruiting clergy and lay leaders who can help to stimulate growth in our parishes: 15 new clergy appointments were announced in 2023 and a further eight have been announced to date in 2024.
- a new 'Michaelmas cohort', offering an accelerated ordination pathway for those with significant ministry experience and mature faith. The first Michaelmas cohort of seven people were ordained as deacons in



THERE are now 60 trained and commissioned Anna Chaplains across our diocese.

They are named after Anna, the faithful widow who – with Simeon – recognised the infant Jesus as the Messiah in the temple at Jerusalem.

As well as offering spiritual care to older people in care homes and the wider community, Anna Chaplains also have a role in helping the elderly to reflect on their spiritual journeys, to listen to the wisdom they have accumulated, and to advocate on their behalf in churches and local communities.

September 2023 and six of them became priests in 2024. A total of 18 were ordained deacon in summer 2024, the highest number for many years.

- developing lay ministry as an important element of all deanery mission action plans - several deaneries have run training courses for lay worship leaders, preachers and pastoral assistants; including the commissioning of 60 Anna Chaplains.

5. BUDGET DEFICITS

The diocese is currently paying £3,078k (2023 figure) a year on direct ministry costs for our clergy. When we are at planned full-strength this will rise to £3,640k a year. This doesn't include the indirect centralised parish support costs of safeguarding, social transformation, education, communications, technical support, clergy/lay training, archdeacons and bishop which amount to £1,143k (some of those costs are shared with other dioceses or not funded from parish share).

In 2023, the parish share requested from all our church congregations was £5,122k, but our actual current parish contribution was only £4,323k. So we had a deficit in 2023 of £277k, which included the financial benefits of a lower-than-planned net appointment of clergy. The budget for 2024 is based on a deficit of £1,107k (based on an 88 per cent parish share collection). This is clearly not a financially sustainable position.

However, over the last two years great progress has been made in the quality, process and transparency of the management of our diocesan finances: greater openness, clarity and timeliness of financial reporting has allowed for better-informed financial control and consideration of plans for financial sustainability. There has been an emphasis on encouraging generosity, with participation in the national Generosity Week for the first time in 2023.

DIOCESAN VISION TO 2030 AND BEYOND

Over the last few years with much prayer, learning from experience, and working together to build relationships and trust, we have developed a diocesan vision that was unanimously passed at the Diocesan Synod in June 2024.

The Diocese of Portsmouth longs to be:

a Rejuvenating community of Jesus-centred, Kingdom-seeking disciples

The vision statement presents the passion and heartbeat of our diocesan life. It paints a picture of the people we want to be, the culture we wish to develop, and the destination that we wish to travel to, together. As we pursue this, we believe our relationship with God will quicken, we will rejoice in seeing the impact of his love in our life, we will be a blessing for our world, and we will flourish and grow together. Let's unpick some elements of it:

REJUVENATING

In serving and bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to our whole community across all age ranges, we pray for rejuvenation of our church communities – for them to grow younger. We especially pray that we may help children and young people find their voice now as the church of today and of tomorrow.

COMMUNITY

Our diocese is a community of communities, part of the Body of Christ in which we serve, honour and care for each other. It is comprised of deaneries, parishes, schools, and chaplaincies where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

JESUS-CENTRED

We long to be learners and followers of Jesus, with our life and values and purpose centred on him. Abiding in Jesus is the fundamental precursor to fruitful ministry. So our first priority, is to deepen our life in God, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for us personally, and to live our life in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

KINGDOM-SEEKING

Jesus taught us to pray “your Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven”. The expression of the reign of God is seen in how we evidence our love for God (up), our love for others (out), our love for God’s world (down), our love each other (in). This 360o, holistic approach to God’s kingdom and reign, encompasses our devotion to God, our passion for social justice, our care for creation, and fellowship with each other. We want everything we do, to make a way for God’s Kingdom to grow.

DISCIPLES

Life in Christ is a continual becoming: becoming more like Jesus, becoming better fitted for love and service in our communities, becoming our true selves within God’s love and grace. Disciples are those who live life in union with God in Christ, and who practice contemplation of his nature and participation in his work in the world.



OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy to deliver our vision has **REJUVENATION** as our top priority. This will involve not only progressively reducing the age-profile of our congregations, but where possible, creating worshipping communities that include children and young people.

Our plan is to create thriving churches which become places where families find a place of belonging and purpose, and to create worshipping communities in schools.

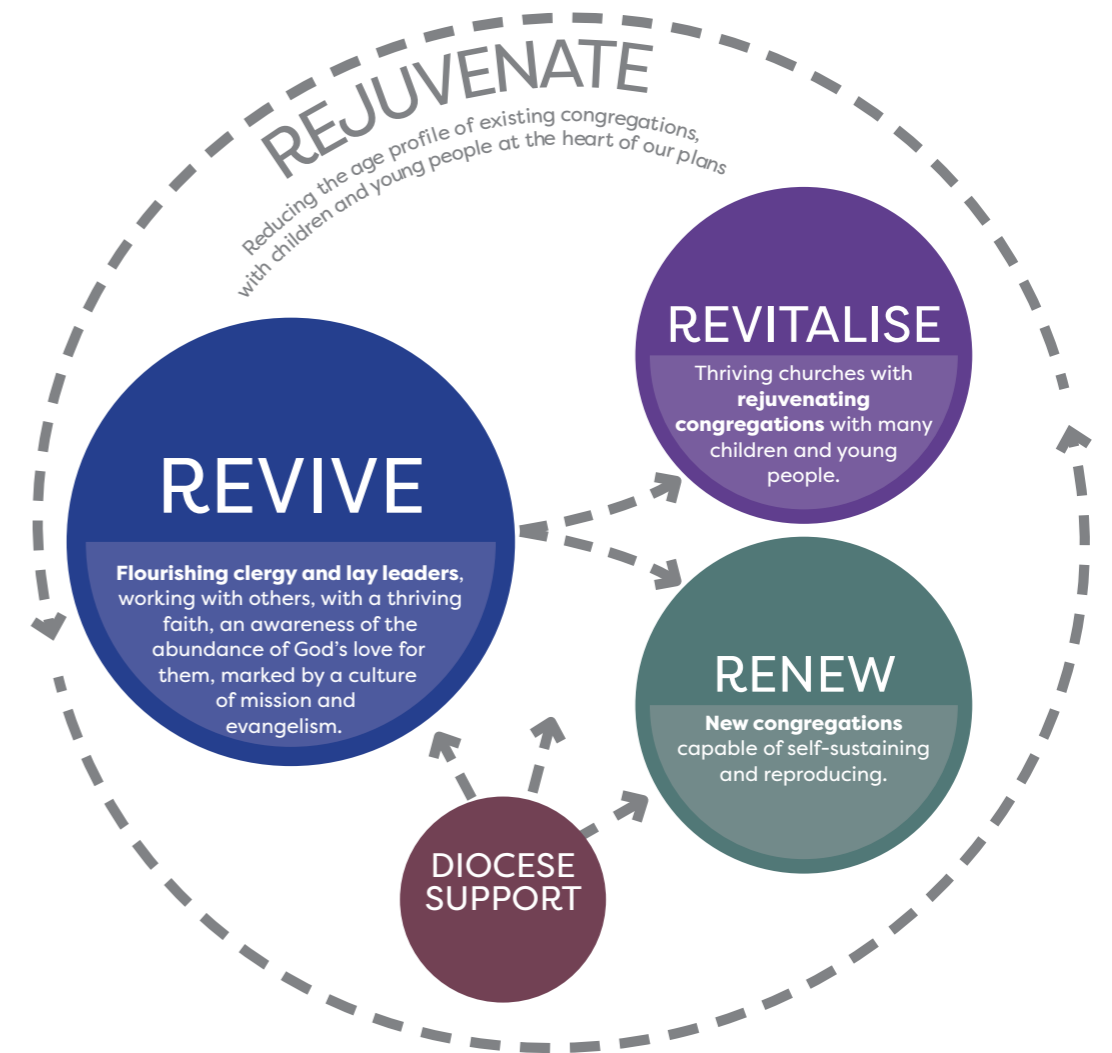
Through this work we aim to:

- More than double the number of children and young disciples.
- Ensure there is a thriving children/youth ministry (ie. more than 25 people) within reach of every child and young person in the diocese.

Our strategy themes are:

- **REVIVE:** a call to deeper prayer for all our clergy and lay leadership to experience a continued personal refreshing of the wonder of God's presence in our lives.
- **REVITALISE:** to grow our existing churches, connecting ministries together to form a pathway that reaches people who are unconnected with church, and supports them as they journey to become committed disciples who own for themselves Jesus' mission.
- **RENEW:** in communities where there is no effective church presence, we believe it is right to plant/transplant new congregations to focus on outreach and younger generations.

It works together with diocesan support like this:



...and each element of this strategy can be unpacked as follows:

REVIVE: INSPIRED LEADERSHIP

We want the faith of all in spiritual leadership in our diocese to be vibrant, growing, deep, and attractive.

If we ourselves do not experience the dynamic of a personal relationship with God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, then we have very little to say to a world in need.

To support them towards inspired leadership for mission, we want our clergy and lay leaders to rediscover the importance of sharing ministry life together. We'll invite clergy and lay leaders to form Benedictine-style networks which we are calling **Cairns**.

These Cairns may be formed within a single substantial parish, or across many benefices. They would develop for themselves a clear sense of missional purpose; and meet together about once a month: to eat together, pray together and study together using materials such as *Divine Renovation*, a study guide by Father James Mallon which aims to make each parish an effective outpost for the gospel.

They would hope to see a deepening of personal faith, mutually encouraging ministry, a sense of solidarity, and a stronger experience of well-being; and so be in the best position to develop well-thought through strategies and plans for growth for each parish.

We'll start with nine **REVIVE** Pilot Cairns, and then expand to cover 40 per cent of our parishes.

REVITALISE: CHURCHES DEVELOPING AND GROWING DISCIPLES

We believe that discipleship is a journey with God that takes people from where they are, into deeper fellowship with him, and his people, the church. God uses his Church to reach a lost world and bring people into his Kingdom. We want to **REVITALISE** our churches so that this can happen more effectively.



THOSE who lead our churches in Hook-with-Warsash, Sarisbury Green, Titchfield and Locks Heath meet once a fortnight for breakfast, which includes prayer for each other.

The desire for clergy to work collaboratively led to the four parishes forming a 'covenanted partnership', which also involves joint services, prayer meetings and other activities. They hold Alpha Courses and evening services together, and have now held two covenant partnership services.

For new clergy arriving, such as the Revs Luiz Lima and Penny Thatcher, the group has been a godsend.

We want our culture and our ministries to connect together to form a realistic pathway that reaches people who are unconnected with church. It can then support them as they journey from the fringe, into the congregation, to become committed disciples who in turn can then take the good news of Jesus to others.

We aim to support the Pilot Cairns with funding of up to £50,000 each, so they can put such credible pathways in place, so that every church member can **engage** with the world in loving service and action, **evangelise** in words and deeds, **establish** disciples firmly centred in Jesus and **equip** them for mission.

We'll start with nine Pilot Cairns for these pathways, and then roll out **REVITALISE** across 40 per cent of diocesan parishes.

We'll also run a range of projects to deliver growth and learn what works well before adopting more widely. These will include:

- A **pathfinder project in Paulsgrove parish** to support significant growth in a working-class estate community over the next five years. This will also include making the church building fit for mission – it's a key missional location which needs investment – and a re-energised traditional expression of Church with a family-focussed service in the Catholic tradition.
- New ways of working in partnership between schools and churches, including **Choir Church**, which creates brand new worshipping communities for families, based on a love of music. Initially this will take place in up to four venues from September 2024 with more to follow in 2025.
- Continuing with existing grant-funded projects in **Newport** and **North Gosport**, and linking them with learning opportunities elsewhere in the Diocese



ST Jude's Church in Southsea is already using a 'pathway to discipleship' to guide people from no faith into discipleship.

Initial contact with those in the community often comes when they throw open their doors for a free cream tea or family fun day – or to offer hot dogs during the switch-on of Southsea's Christmas lights.

They then might sign up to an Alpha Course or come to a Sunday service to find out more. Then they might discover more about faith and want to sign up for a regular weekly Bible study group to become committed disciples.



We'll grow our capacity for children, families and youth work across all deaneries. Initially this will be by means of:

- Established expert training in this area for clergy and volunteers, via those such as Youthscape LaunchPad and Youthscape Essentials.
- Raising up new leaders in work with children, families and young people from within congregations.
- Providing additional resources, which may include children and youth workers.
- A formal training route for children and youth workers.

RENEW: PLANT IN THE GAPS

In communities where there is no effective church presence, we believe it is right to plant/transplant new congregations to focus on outreach and younger generations. Church plants can be clergy-led or lay-led, and can be from any church tradition. Church planting at its simplest means starting a new worshipping community expressed as any variation within our mixed ecology. Church planting is nothing new – all of our current churches were once “plants”.

We'll continue with planting projects already underway at Haven Church Gosport and Ryde on the Isle of Wight. And we'll launch major new church plants, each aiming to serve hundreds of new worshippers, in the following places:

- In Fareham, we'll gather a planting team at St John's Fareham then plant at **St Peter and St Paul Fareham**, under the leadership of an experienced planting priest across both parishes. It is envisaged that this new worshipping community will provide a further church plant into the new 6,000-home development at **Welborne** in 2027.
- In Portsmouth we'll plant from Harbour Church (a fruitful HTB-style church) to develop new church congregations at the two Harbour satellite locations of **Harbour City** and **Harbour Copnor**. For a sustainable operating model we will share staff resources across all the three Harbour sites.

In addition to our “tried and tested” large plants, we'll also be exploring smaller scale intra-parish planting by means of:

- Four **Flourish** pilots – church-school partnerships that aim to deliver a thriving children and youth worshipping community based in the school. The pilots started in September 2024 in Bembridge C of E Primary School, Isle of Wight; The Bay C of E school (primary and secondary sites), Sandown, Isle of Wight; and Horndean C of E Primary School on the mainland.
- **Leigh Park Pathfinder** project, an intra-parish plant in Park Community School, Leigh Park, delivering a new worshipping community with a thriving children's and youth ministry.
- “Myriad” training to equip parish teams for intra-parish planting

OUTCOMES AND FUNDING

Overall, within the time of this strategy, our diocese aims to:

- Double the number of children and young disciples from around 875 to around 1,800.
- Increase the number of churches with thriving children and youth ministries (ie. more than 25 children and young people actively involved) from 11 churches to around 40.
- Halt overall attendance decline and move to growth of 25 per cent, growing Average Weekly Attendance in our churches from around 8,000 to around 10,000.
- Equip and energise our clergy and lay leaders for mission.



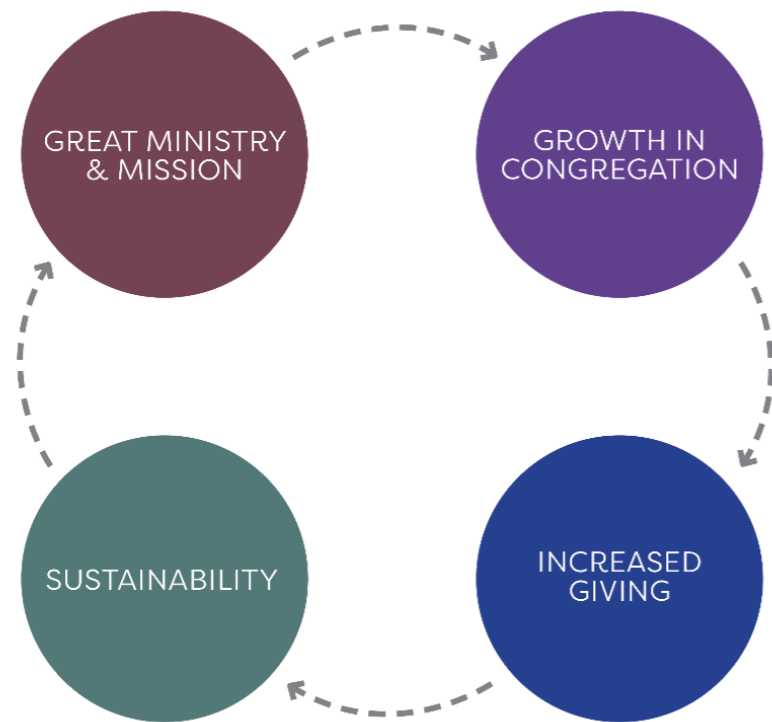
IMAGINE a scenario where children are worshipping God in a style they've chosen themselves – and in a place they visit every weekday.

That's the vision behind Flourish, a new Church of England initiative that aims to create worshipping communities within schools. Pupils choose to meet together at lunchtimes or after school for a session of songs, craft, activities and teaching that they've helped to shape.

This will now happen in four schools in our diocese from September, as we help to pilot Flourish worshipping communities.

One of the principles behind Flourish worshipping communities is that they will be created and shaped with the pupils themselves at the heart of the decision-making. Each one may be different, depending on the school's context and geography and the input of the children themselves.

- Improve financial health with sustainable operating models for all plants and revitalisations.



In order to make this strategy happen, we have asked the national Church of England’s Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (the SMMI Board) for £5.31m towards our total spend of £8.75m, as detailed below:

Spend by TYPE & FUNDING SOURCE				
	People	Buildings	Other	Total
Total SMMI (national C of E)	£3,927,222	£1,220,000	£167,124	£5,314,346
Total DBF (our diocese)	£2,358,833	£0	£71,741	£2,430,573
Total Other	£405,254	£598,500	£4,244	£1,007,998
Grand Total	£6,691,309	£1,818,500	£243,109	£8,752,917

PEOPLE PLAN

To support the objectives and activities set out in this strategy, we need to ensure we are suitable resourced with the right capacity and capability. Mission, ministry and change-management in challenging contexts require investment in the development of our people whether lay or ordained, paid or volunteer, and in the overlapping contexts of parish, deanery and diocesan work.

DIOCESAN ENABLING AND SUPPORT

A small number diocesan team roles are envisaged to enable the work of delivering this strategy. These diocesan roles are to be funded by a mix of grant funding and DBF money. These are:

- Leads for each of the **REVIVE**, **REVITALISE** and **RENEW** strands – three people (one per strand) to coordinate and animate this work. These will be funded via C of E strategic funding. We’ll then review and decide whether to extend.
- Children Youth and Families Officer, and two part-time Growing Faith Enablers (2.2FTE in total) to lead key aspects of work such as Flourish and Youthscape Launchpad, and coordinate and support shared learning. These roles are DBF-funded and to be sustained as part of our core budget.
- Continuation of the current three Strategic Programme roles, plus one additional person – These will be time-limited and funded via C of E strategic funding.
- Head of Strategy Development – a C of E strategic funded-post to free up the Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight to lead on Strategy, essential for continuity as we move to delivery of these proposals, and for further development towards our 2026 bid.

DIOCESAN PIPELINE

The Diocesan staff has been significantly re-organised to create a new Ministry and Discipleship team that aligns with our vision and our REJUVENATION strategy (REVIVE, REVITALISE, RENEW). This supports a closely coordinated

and intentional approach to build up pipelines of leaders for mission and growth.

Our planning will include looking ahead to likely need, and building up people for a range of roles focused on growth:

- Curates
- Planting Curates
- Youth and Children's workers
- Internships
- SSMs

PARISH MISSION AND MINISTRY

Training and support will be provided to equip existing clergy and lay leaders with skills and tools to develop their local mission and ministry eg. Youthscape, Revive, Divine Renovation. To give sufficient capacity to deliver, we will use materials and resources from partners such as Youthscape, and adopt a "train the trainer" approach to allow local delivery. We'll continue to encourage and support training for a range of lay roles such as Lay Worship Leader, Lay Preacher and Lay Pastoral Assistant.



THE new vicar of St John's Church, Fareham, is coming with a reputation as a prolific church planter.

Bishop Jonathan has appointed the Rev Henry Kendal to be the new vicar of St John's. He was most recently the vicar of a large charismatic church in London that has planted six new congregations over the past 30 years.

Henry was associate vicar and then vicar of St Barnabas, Woodside Park, in Finchley, north London for 23 years. Before that, he'd also led a church plant as a layman and a curate in St Peter's Church, Roxeth, in Harrow.

"The big thing about St John's Fareham is the opportunity to make a difference," he said. "I'm really pleased to be coming to a place with such a missional bishop, and there is a great chance to rejuvenate a local church and to step out in mission."

MORE INFORMATION

To find out more information about our vision and strategy and some more detail about those things mentioned in this document, see: portsmouth.anglican.org/strategy.





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Jesus-centred, Kingdom-seeking

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THE CHURCH
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