**Diocese of Winchester - Growing Rural Parishes Programme 2024**

**Application Process**

1. **Introduction**

In July 2023, the Diocese of Winchester was awarded £460,000 of Diocesan Improvement Programme (DIP) funding ‘in principle’ to support our work in rural multi-parish benefices over the next five years through the Growing Rural Parishes Programme (GRPP). The GRPP is our diocese's commitment to the vital importance of the rural Church, building on the knowledge and experience gained through our earlier Benefice of the Future project.

As part of the GRPP, we are making £30,000 available to each of nine multi-parish benefices to help their ministry teams (of lay and ordained members) to develop parish ministry of the future. We are allocating the funding through three annual rounds of bidding, in each case selecting three rural benefices for support. The details of the selected benefices in each round are then submitted to the Church Commissioners for final approval.

In GRPP Round 1 in autumn 2023, we successfully received funding for the first group of rural benefices: Sherfield on Loddon, Thorngate & Blackwater, and a joint team from Overton and Bright Waters.

This current Mini Bidding Round therefore seeks to select the second group of three rural benefices for support. The following sections set out the support on offer, the selection criteria, the form your bid should take and the timeline for the bidding process.

Please note that the deadline for receipt of bids in this round is close of play on **Friday, 20 September 2024**. Please send your bid to Jon Whale ([jon.whale@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:jon.whale@winchester.anglican.org)). You are also welcome to contact Jon for an informal chat.

1. **Background**

In early 2017 internal diocesan discussions began in relation to how we might better support our rural churches, clergy and parishes. For too long we have asked rural clergy to take on more churches, often with fewer resources and with no real idea as to where this will end. The current and projected continuing fall in national stipendiary clergy numbers suggested this situation was only going to get worse. Whilst the Diocese had been trying to work, through its deaneries, at pastoral reorganisation and in allocating posts as creatively as possible (particularly through using housing for House for Duty posts), something both more radical and more imaginative was now needed.

Our belief was and is that what we were proposing is about taking seriously the ministry of the whole people of God in our rural parishes. The aim was to better enable Christians to live out their gifts in discipleship in order to develop thriving, sustainable and generative patterns of mission and ministry that more fruitfully serve the common good. Much of the innovation and simplification envisaged sought to lift the burden of maintenance from parishes. We expected this to be a process of mutual learning in how we rejoice in and share the gospel.

The counter intuitive idea was to go bigger, with more than one clergy person per benefice (both for reasons of clergy wellbeing and bringing different gifts); to seek to ensure richer resource across churches, economies of scale and to create diversity, differentiation, interdependence and mutual flourishing.

The resulting Benefice of the Future (BoF) programme gained Strategic Development Fund support and has been the source of significant learning and encouragement. With GRPP, want to go further.

Garnering the lessons being learned, we believe we are at an ideal time to build on the achievements of BoF and develop a wider reaching programme for growing rural parishes.  This has taken shape in the form of GRPP.

1. **What We Offer**

The overall aim of GRPP is to grow rural parishes. Essential to this is a gentle but important culture change in how parishes view their life together as a benefice. Instead of benefices being viewed as multiple parishes led by a vicar or possibly a small clerical team, we want benefices to come to be seen as a unified unit of mission, with a shared ministry team (lay as well as ordained). We believe that multiple small but effective changes in approach, culture and relationships can lead to significant growth and sustainability.

GRPP therefore works with benefices to deploy and use some or all of the following tools and approaches to help facilitate this cultural change. The £30,000 grant per benefice is offered to help meet the cost of the proposed tools.

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| **Support for the benefice** | **Method** | **Period** | **Total value per benefice** | **Notes** |
| Development of, and support for, the benefice leadership team | Benefice leaders’ learning days including key outside speakers | 4 days pa for 3 years | £1,000 | Arranged by GRPP team |
| Empowering the congregation to try new things | Congregation learning days (to include members from all the benefice’s congregations) | 24  months | £500 | Arranged by GRPP team |
| Growing new lay leaders | Funding of free training via the Winchester Diocese Mission & Ministry Team | 36 months | £1,000 | £100 per person for Bishop’s Commission for Mission or similar |
| Improved IT & branding | Providing broadband connections;  Funding new/improved websites;  Funding new branding | 24 months | £10,500 | GRPP team to provide a list of trusted suppliers |
| Centralised benefice/parish administration and use of CMS | Part funding of admin. costs (up to £7,000 pa);  Funding of church management software (e.g., iKnow) | 24 months | £17,000 | Church of England has a national partnership with iKnow |
| Increasing ministry to children, families and young people | Advice on approach to, and development of, ministry to children, families and young people | 24 months | FREE | Provided by Children and Family consultant |
| Ideas for development of community wide projects | Sharing best practice from around the UK | 24 months | FREE | Organised by GRPP team |
| Support and advice from early adopters | Sharing best practice from the BoF pilot areas | 24 months | FREE | Organised by GRPP team |
|  |  | **Total** | **£30,000** |  |

1. **What would be your commitment?**

We appreciate that timescales in rural areas are longer than in urban and suburban areas. So, whilst we hope that each benefice will have achieved the following outcomes within the three-year GRPP funding period, we understand that it may take up to five years for some of the growth targets to show through.

The desired outcomes are as follows:

* The benefice will have established a benefice ministry team of lay and ordained, stipendiary, salaried and voluntary members sharing in the leadership, discipleship care and developments within the benefice.
* Growth in the worshipping community numbers which in some benefices will mean the rate of decline in the size of the combined benefice worshipping community will slow, stabilise and then move into growth over a 3–5-year period
* There will be around 10 new lay vocations (LLM, LLW, BCM, BPP) discerned in the benefice
* Where possible, at least one candidate for ordained self-supporting ministry will also come forward
* The benefice will be/become a potentially suitable rural training context for curacies
* The benefice will launch at least one new successful children, families or youth ministry, leading to at least 10 new children joining the worshipping community
* The benefice will commit its own funds to take over the ongoing costs and investment in their local mission and ministry once the GRPP funding period comes to an end
* A learning community will be developed to distil learnings from the benefice to be shared more widely across other rural benefices

In order to ensure that each benefice is making progress towards these outcomes, the GRPP team will require the benefice to report back on a regular basis. The form of the reporting pack will be discussed with successful bidders on award of their funding.

1. **Selection Criteria**

To help us decide which three benefices to support in this round, we have developed a set of selection criteria. We will be using these when we come to analyse the bids. We thought it would be useful to share these with you now so they can help you to decide whether to submit a bid and how to shape your bid if you go ahead.

Please note that GRPP is aimed at larger multi-parish benefices, so we are looking for applications from benefices of at least three parishes (or where there are more than three churches in the benefice) or joint applications from neighbouring benefices. Smaller benefices are most welcome to partner with adjacent benefices in order to meet the size criterion.

Appendix 1 sets out the selection criteria we will be using and the kind of evidence you can offer to show us you meet those criteria. It is not expected that a benefice will fulfil all these criteria. Rather, we’re looking for you to show us that you have a stable team and are committed to change and development in your area.

1. **How to Bid**

We are asking you to submit a short proposal (see Appendix 2) which sets out the following information:

* The name of your benefice/benefices plus the main point of contact
* An overview of your benefice(s) covering geographical location, number of parishes and churches, sizes of parish congregations (using worshipping community figures), plus demographics of the local population to the best of your knowledge (e.g., population numbers in each parish, age breakdown, main occupations (or retired), number of schools and school roll numbers).
* How you meet the selection criteria set out in Appendix 1
* How you propose to use the support and funding on offer to meet the outcomes set out in Section 5 above

We appreciate that you may need some help in preparing your bid. If that is so, Jon Whale from the Strategic Development Team in on hand to assist. Please contact Jon on [jon.whale@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:jon.whale@winchester.anglican.org) with any questions or queries.

1. **Timeline**

The timeline for this bidding round is set out in the following table.

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| --- | --- |
| **Deadline** | **Task** |
| 1 July 2024 | Launch of bidding process |
| **COP 20 September 2024** | **Deadline for receipt of bids** |
| w/c 23 September 2024 | Analysis of bids and shortlisting |
| 15 October 2024 | Selection Panel  Selection of second group of three benefices to fund |
| 16 October 2024 | Notification to second group of three successful benefices of ‘in principle’ award  Feedback to unsuccessful bidders |
| November 2024 | Submission of GRPP Stage 2 bid to V&S team (including details of second group of 3 benefices to support) |
| December 2024 | Notification of result |
| Early 2025 | Start of GRPP support to the three successful benefices |

**Appendix 1 – Selection Criteria**

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| **Selection criteria** | **Forms of supporting evidence** |
| Benefice of three parishes or more (or a combined number of at least three parishes if working in partnership with a neighbouring benefice) | Names of the parishes |
| A commitment to growth | Headline details of your latest Mission Action Plan or current priorities |
| Active evangelism | * New forms of worship aimed at those who don’t currently come to church * Running Alpha or Pilgrim courses |
| Ongoing discipleship | * Home groups * Bible study courses * Confirmation classes |
| Community engagement | * Drop in cafes * Running a foodbank or similar * Community events on church premises |
| Engagement with children and young people | * Local school(s) Collective Worship/Open the book * After school clubs * Messy Church/Toddler groups * Youth clubs/Holiday clubs |
| A united leadership team | Previous examples of lay and ordained team members working together |
| Stable clerical leadership | Incumbent is established in post and not planning to retire during the next three years |
| Ministry & mission grounded in prayer | * Prayer groups * Leadership team quiet days |
| Support of PCCs | * Full complement of key officers * Willingness to work together |
| Actively Caring for God’s Creation | ECO Church application or award |
| For partnering benefices | Evidence of having worked together before or commitment to partnering |

**Appendix 2: Draft Application Form**

**Diocese of Winchester - Growing Rural Parishes Programme 2024**

**Application Form**

**Name of benefice(s):**

**Key point of contact:**

**Please describe your benefice(s)**

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| *E.g.*   * *number of parishes and churches,* * *sizes of church congregations (using worshipping community figures),* * *demographics of the local population to the best of your knowledge (e.g., population numbers in each parish, age breakdown, main occupations (or retired), number of schools and school roll numbers).*   *(Suggested word limit = 500)* |

**How do you meet the Selection Criteria? (See Appendix 1)**

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| *(Suggested word limit = 1,000)* |

**How do you propose to use the support and funding on offer to meet the outcomes set out in Section 4?**

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| *(Suggested word limit = 1,000)* |

Please submit your completed application form to Jon Whale ([jon.whale@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:jon.whale@winchester.anglican.org)) by **Friday 20 September 2024** latest.