

OUR NEXT BID - HAVE YOUR SAY

We are now in the planning stages of submitting a new application for national church funding to invest into our diocese.

To be awarded the funds, we need a strategic plan which meets the needs and aspirations of our diocese, but also that is evidenced-based and in line with national objectives.

We have begun the process of developing ideas for this bid, but before we go further, would like to hear the voices and ideas of as many people as possible across our diocesan community.

To fully understand the background and strategic thinking behind the bid, we encourage everyone to download and read our [Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan 2025](#).

You can also read a summary below and follow the link under the 'Have Your Say' heading to give your feedback.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Our Vision

Bishop Philip has invited our communities to [Walk the Wessex Way](#) – a vision for our diocese, based on the pillars of Serving, Learning, Growing and Loving, and responding to our proud history and heritage to help shape our present and future mission and ministry.

During 2024 therefore, the Bishop's Staff Team (BST) considered its own response to Walking the Wessex Way, and has set a series of objectives and commitments for this next season. [Please read them here](#).

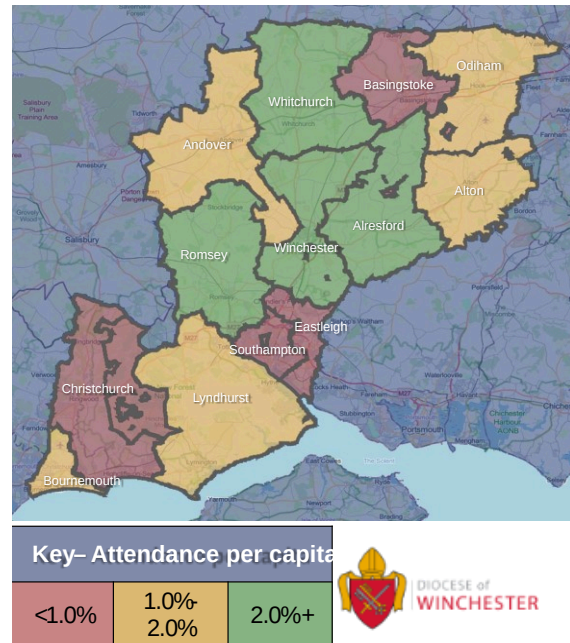
Our Challenges

Our diocese has much to celebrate and give thanks for as our parishes, schools, chaplaincies and worshipping communities respond to their callings to serve, learn, grow and love. We must however also recognise with humility and courage the many challenges and pressures we collectively carry, seen in decline in attendance, volunteers, income and resources.

It's a varied picture, as these images show:

Deanery Overview

Deanery	Pop	Attendance per Capita	Child Attendance per Capita	Ministry Spend per Capita
Southampton	248,000	0.7%	0.5%	£3
Bournemouth	160,000	1.2%	1.1%	£5
Eastleigh	140,000	0.8%	0.5%	£5
Basingstoke	136,000	0.9%	0.5%	£6
Christchurch	114,000	0.9%	0.3%	£7
Lyndhurst	88,000	1.8%	0.5%	£13
Winchester	72,000	2.1%	1.3%	£16
Andover	71,000	1.1%	0.5%	£8
Odiham	57,000	1.9%	0.9%	£14
Romsey	47,000	2.0%	0.7%	£14
Alton	35,000	1.6%	0.5%	£14
Whitchurch	26,000	2.4%	1.9%	£20
Alresford	15,000	2.9%	1.0%	£31
Diocese	1,250,000	1.2%	0.8%	£8

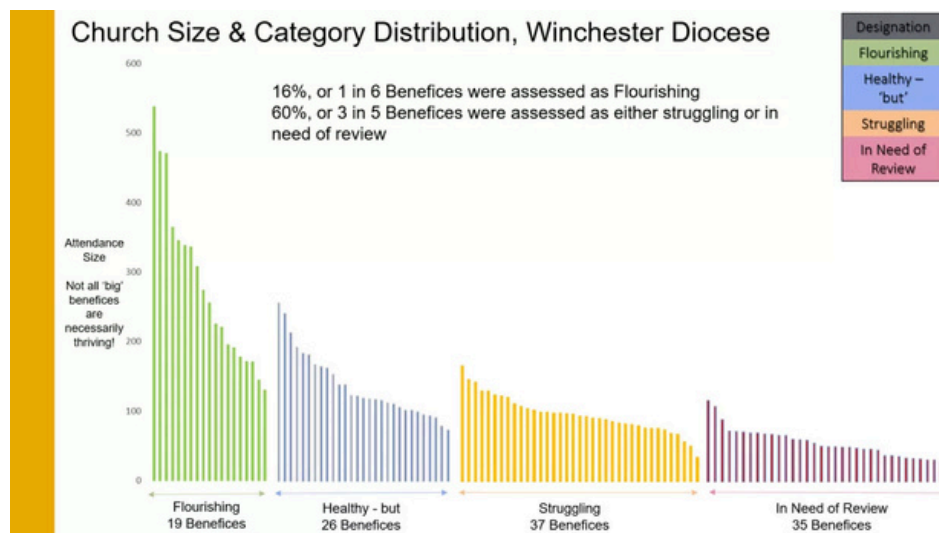


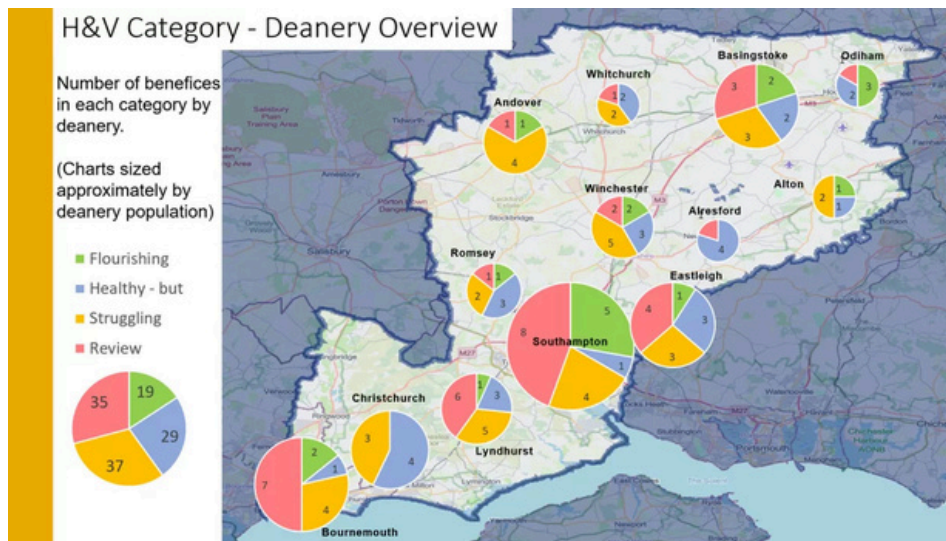
Understanding Your Benefice

We have recently commissioned a review of all our benefice data and stats to help us understand where we are as a diocesan community.

Whilst we recognise that statistics can never tell the whole story of the true impact of mission and ministry, this data can help to understand and assess patterns and trends that will help inform our response and offer support where it is needed. Please see the graphs below for an overview of some of this data.

Everyone is welcome to have a look at the data for your benefice – called your ‘Health & Vitality Dashboard’. [Please email parish support to ask for a copy.](#)





Previous Bids

In putting together our next bid, it has been helpful to look back at the past and see what we can learn from previous applications for national church funding, some which have worked well, some less so.

Several of our past projects have been externally evaluated. The report below highlights some of the key achievements and challenges that were faced, and suggests some key learnings and recommendations for the future.

[Download the Going Fast or Going Far Report here.](#)

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

The proposals below – [Benefice Development Programme](#), [Growing Rural Parishes](#), and [Serving Southampton/Believing in Bournemouth](#) – are draft plans that the diocese is presenting for feedback and improvement.

They are all underpinned by a desire to invest broadly in parish ministry, starting where benefices are and working together to listen and develop interventions that are going to lead to flourishing communities. In very simple terms, we want more ‘flourishing’ and ‘healthy’ benefices and fewer ‘struggling’, and ‘in need of review’ benefices.

Here are some suggested principles for developing plans:

1. **Based in Prayer:** Starting from a place of humility, placing our trust in Christ, seeking His guidance and wisdom in all we do.

2. **Bespoke:** Understanding that every community is different and support is required.
3. **Evidence Based:** Ensuring our plans and priorities are considered and challenged through the wealth of data, research, and experience across the Church.
4. **Co-created:** Combining the expertise of local clergy, ministers and laity who are the experts on their communities, with peer-group learning and the knowledge of the diocesan team.
5. **Resourced:** Ensuring each plan is fully costed, with dedicated expert advisers identified to support the local team in the implementation and delivery.
6. **Times of Transition and Opportunity:** Using times of significant change and transition as springboards for wider change planning (e.g. vacancies, pastoral schemes, demographic changes etc.)
7. **Prioritised:** Prioritising where both the need and potential is greatest, and particularly plans that will most support ministry to children, young people and families.
8. **Structurally Aware:** Working within the reality of church structures and legislation, not imposing top-down change and protecting the right of benefices to opt-out of any programme.
9. **Flexible:** Ensuring adaptability and flexibility are baked into our plans to allow us to respond to changing contexts, challenges and priorities.

BENEFICE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

This part of the plan proposes working with 50 benefices over the next 5-7 years to develop a menu of costed potential support packages, interventions, training and tools to assist benefices in improving core areas of their health and vitality, with a particular focus on youth, children and families.

The plan would include Benefice Development Advisers to be appointed to walk alongside benefices as they develop and discern their local plans, providing challenge, support, advocacy and expertise.

Here is a draft Benefice Development Plan Sample Menu:

Support	Duration	
Parish Revitalisation Programme	3	
Funded Benefice Ops Manager		
Funded Benefice YCF Pastor	5	Tapered funding
Grant for YCF Equipment	One off	
LyCiG		
GROW		
Mission		
Funding for interim stipendiary post	3 years	
Mission Transition Grants		Dependent on context
Coaching for Benefice leader	8 sessions	

GROWING RURAL PARISHES PROGRAMME

As a diocese where 80% of our parishes are rural, any strategic mission plans must include our rural areas.

This programme builds on previous funded schemes, Benefice of the Future/Growing Rural Parishes, which have proven impactful for many benefices. The plan is to seek further funding over the next 5 years for the 15 remaining benefices that would qualify for the programme.

Parishes can apply to the scheme to create a bespoke action and growth plan over the first three years. A budget of approximately £30k per benefice (over the 3 years) will be offered to invest in operational infrastructure, training, communications and branding, and administrative support.

As well as the bespoke support and investment, each benefice will need to participate in regular active learning sets with colleagues from other benefices – pooling ideas, learnings, and progress.

[Read how other parishes have benefitted from GRP funding >>>](#)

SERVING SOUTHAMPTON & BELIEVING IN BOURNEMOUTH

We recognise that our two largest conurbations have huge missional opportunities and challenges, but have had the lowest level of investment for so many years.

Our new Bishop of Southampton, +Rhiannon, comes to us with direct experience of leading 'Inspiring Ipswich', which has led to some wonderful outcomes and developments. She will be supported by two dedicated Programme managers, will work closely with clergy and parishes across Southampton and Bournemouth to develop deanery wide mission development plans to include social and civic impact, revitalisation projects, new worshipping communities and strengthening investment in existing mission and ministry.

It will build on the principles of the Benefice Development Programme but recognising the complexities and inter-dependencies of the specific contexts, this project will seek to offer similar bespoke support whilst also ensuring that synergies and cross-parish boundary opportunities are not missed.

HAVE YOUR SAY

The diocese now wants to consult widely on these proposed plans and is committed to taking on feedback and showing the impact of the consultation.

The plans we are sharing now will change, adapt, develop and grow as we work through this process of consultation and discernment.

[You can offer feedback through this online form.](#)

The diocese will also be holding six consultation sessions with various groups, as well as presenting the proposals at Clergy Briefings and at the various Synods.