



Bishop of Oxford

Statement of Needs



WELCOME!

Thank you for 'visiting' the Diocese of Oxford through this Statement of Needs and for exploring something of our life together. Whether you are discerning a calling to join us as our next bishop or seeking to understand more about the diocese: welcome! We are praying for you. Please pray for us. What follows is a picture of a big, complex, busy, purposeful diocese; our attempt to describe who we are, what we're for, and what we do.

IS GOD CALLING YOU?

In these pages...

- **You will read much that calls for competence.** We are looking for a bishop of character; someone caught up in the pursuit of holiness.
- **You will find much that demands your attention.** We are seeking a bishop who fixes their eyes on Jesus and listens first for his voice.
- **You will discover great diversity.** We are looking for a bishop who will draw us together, love us, care for us, and challenge us as we seek to grow together into the likeness of Christ.
- **You will locate a desire to serve Jesus and make him known.** We are seeking a bishop who can inspire us in prayer, teaching, serving and preaching as an experienced under-shepherd of the Good Shepherd.
- **You will see much that is already in place.** We are looking for a bishop to lead us on and help us capture, prayerfully, what is now and next for us.
- **You will encounter much that is serious and pressing.** We are looking for a bishop who can manage such weightiness with joy.
- **You will trace a significant agenda, with much to do.** We are looking for a bishop who will help us be a prayerful, reflective people, as well as a people of faithful action.
- **You will unearth words and phrases that express who we think we need** - but we are open to the surprise of the Spirit, to the God who calls the unexpected, even the unlikely.



**Almighty God, giver of every good gift:
look graciously on your Church and illuminate our path
as we seek a new bishop.**



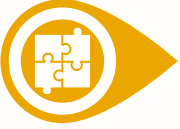



**Help us to work together for the good of your kingdom
and all who live, work and study in the Diocese of Oxford.
Give wisdom and listening hearts to those who have influence.**

**Send out your Holy Spirit to call one
who will faithfully teach, pastor, care for and equip us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Amen.

Vacancy in See prayer

CONTENTS

	Where we are	4
	Who we are	7
	Foundations and challenges	21
	Being salt and light	53
	Beyond the boundaries	58
	Who we are looking for	62



WHERE WE ARE

Over 2.5 million people live and work in the Diocese of Oxford; a diocese of three counties, made up of rural hamlets, market towns, science and tech hotspots, multicultural university cities and fast-expanding housing estates.

The following pages begin to bring to life the Church of England within this distinct, dynamic Thames Valley region.

WHERE WE ARE

The Diocese of Oxford covers approximately 2,200 square miles across Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

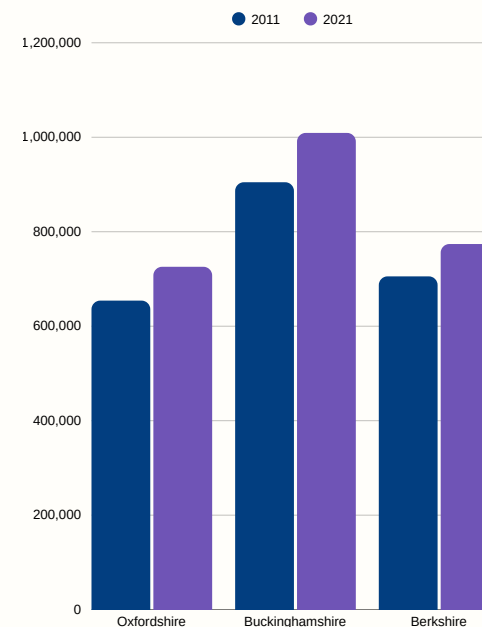
Oxfordshire brings together its famous university city with market towns and agricultural communities. The green belt protects Oxford and surrounding areas from uncontrolled growth – though proposals for the ‘grey belt’ would see over 40,000 new homes built by 2040.

Berkshire moves from rurality in the west to more densely populated commuter towns towards London. The well-developed transport infrastructure enables national and international connections, though many areas are seeing an increasing economic divide.

Major housing developments are driving fast-paced growth across Buckinghamshire, with expansion projected well into the coming decades. While many areas rank highly on national living-standards measures, there remains a stark economic divide.

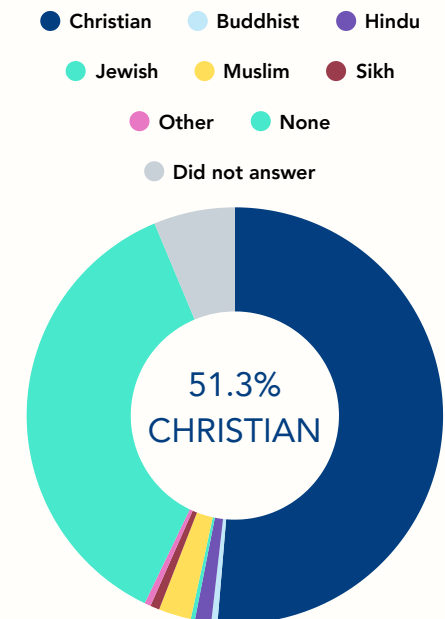
POPULATION: THEN AND NOW

2011 and 2021 UK Census data



RELIGION ACROSS THE DIOCESE

2021 UK Census data



ARMED FORCES

The diocese has one of the largest Armed Forces communities in the Church of England, including many training centres and the headquarters for the RAF. The signing of the Armed Forces Covenant by the Diocesan Bishop and Dean of Christ Church Cathedral in 2026 acknowledges these strong relationships and provides a springboard for further support to serving personnel, civilian workers, service families and veterans.

CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS

Christian organisations have deep roots in each county, including Open Doors in Oxfordshire, Latin Link in Berkshire, and Scripture Union in Buckinghamshire, to name just a few.

KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

In the Thames Valley region, described as Europe's strongest knowledge economy, scientific research is pivotal to the life and work of our communities. Each county hosts innovation centres of national significance. Major investments in the area include Culham Data Centre, the UK's first AI Growth Zone.

EDUCATION

Six universities bring unique character to the diocese, each with their own strong mission, from championing international and postgraduate education to pioneering opportunities for those with lower educational qualifications. Chaplaincies in each institution offer students pastoral care and opportunities to explore faith.

Alongside the universities, the diocese hosts three of the Church of England's ten residential theological colleges; Wycliffe Hall, St Stephen's House, and Ripon College Cuddesdon. Each has a distinctive heritage, and together they reflect the breadth of Church tradition and theological formation within the Church of England.

Where local economies rely on universities, instability in the sector has consequences beyond staff and students, affecting local jobs, services and wider communities. Although people come from around the world to study at our universities, there is another pressing local reality of many teenagers not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

WHO WE ARE

Over the past decade, we have sought to live out a calling to be a **Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world: contemplative, compassionate and courageous.**

This vision has provided a common framework across our churches and schools, lived out in locally distinctive ways. The priorities we have been travelling with - including growing faith amongst children and young people and caring for creation - remain vitally important to us and are embedded within the rhythm of our life and supported through the prioritisation of our resources.

Under the leadership of our next bishop, we are ready to discern our God-given calling for this new chapter of our life together; **those new ways of being, or doing, that the Spirit is pointing us to.**

EPISCOPAL AREAS

The diocese is split into four Episcopal Areas: Oxford (City), Dorchester, Reading and Buckingham.

The Bishop of Oxford has pastoral care of Oxford (City), the two deaneries of Oxford and Cowley. The other Areas are overseen by area bishops. All Areas are supported by dedicated teams comprising of archdeacon, associate archdeacon and PA support, plus staff from Church House with a focus on parish development, vocations, safeguarding, and mission and ministry with children and young people.

The Area teams and parishes draw on substantial support provided by colleagues based in Church House.

Reflecting the Diocese of Oxford's size and complexity, the area scheme has a high degree of delegation from the diocesan bishop to area bishops. This is balanced by a commitment to collegiality, a common diocesan vision, and shared strategic priorities, work held and led by the diocesan bishop.



OXFORD AREA

The Oxford Area covers Oxford city and Kidlington. It is primarily urban, with a notably young population. The economy is rooted in education, tourism, science and retail, though there are areas of deep deprivation. The city has flourishing interfaith relationships, reflected in the Faith and Civic Leaders Forum. It is a leading centre of theological research on doctrine, biblical studies, social justice and the environment.

CHALLENGES

- An imbalance of resources across the city
- Developing ministerial partnerships in outer estate parishes and areas of new housing
- Holding together every shade of Anglican tradition across the area



2 deaneries
26 benefices



47 church buildings
14 church schools

The Oxford Area is an important aspect of the diocesan bishop's ministry, enabling pastoral and sacramental ministry locally alongside broader diocesan and national responsibilities.

The area calls for a bishop who is able theologically and pastorally to bridge and convene within civic, academic and intercultural environments. They will speak credibly within academic settings, engage thoughtfully in public and civic debate, and foster trust across Church traditions and identities.

Our next bishop will nurture and guide a community from which many are called to ordination.



27 stipendiary clergy
39 non-stipendiary clergy



23 Licensed Lay Ministers
83 clergy with Permission to Officiate

BUCKINGHAM AREA

The Buckingham Area team is in a season of change and growth, led by the Rt Revd Dave Bull, consecrated in 2025, and a new archdeacon, who started in early 2026.

This sense of a new generation of leaders is amplified in the deanery leadership. Four of the ten deaneries appointed a new Area Dean in 2025, with another four expected in 2026.

The area team focuses on building collaborative relationships, prioritising wellbeing and supporting parishes in a way that brings hope and builds faith.

The full range of Anglican church life can be found in Buckinghamshire, Slough and Milton Keynes, from the smallest village churches to large town and city churches. 14 Anglican chaplains minister to various institutions, including HQ Air Command in High Wycombe, four hospital trusts, four prisons, and three independent schools.

CHALLENGES

- The need for a step-change in our witness in the Milton Keynes area
- The pressures that clergy and church officer vacancies place on parishes and the area team



10 deaneries
89 benefices



284 church buildings
80 church schools



111 stipendiary clergy
59 non-stipendiary clergy



86 Licensed Lay Ministers
132 clergy with Permission to Officiate

DORCHESTER AREA

Led by the Rt Revd Gavin Collins since 2021, the Dorchester Area covers the whole of Oxfordshire except the City of Oxford and Kidlington. This is the most rural area of the diocese, with no town or cities with a population of over 60,000, and though a largely wealthy area, there is hidden poverty throughout.

Based in Church House, collaborative working is a natural and formative part of the area team's day-to-day mission and ministry. The team supports parish development, appointments, and neurodiverse clergy. They centre their work through regular prayer together.

Dorchester Abbey is a significant centre for the Bishop of Dorchester's ministry. It serves not only as the spiritual centre of its village, but also for the episcopal area, and as a place of pilgrimage.

CHALLENGES

- The reality and roles of rural churches in their communities
- The nuances of the shared leadership in multi-parish benefices and the pressures on those leaders
- Local plans estimate there is a need for over 97,000 new houses



11 deaneries
87 benefices



326 church buildings
108 church schools



93 stipendiary clergy
57 non-stipendiary clergy



74 Licensed Lay Ministers
219 clergy with Permission to Officiate

READING AREA

The Reading Area team exists to share in Jesus' work of transformation across Berkshire with faith, purpose, joy, curiosity and care. Led by the Rt Revd Mary Gregory since 2025, they develop leaders and equip parishes to flourish in faith and community through investing in relationships, growing trust, challenging injustice, and learning together.

Relationships across deaneries have become a notable strength, with a culture of collegiality, constructive challenge, and strong pastoral engagement. Diversity is real and valued, enriched by communities including nationally funded work with Hong Kongers, and an ongoing commitment to enable LGBTQIA+ colleagues to flourish in ministry.



6 deaneries
81 benefices



174 church buildings
81 church schools

Appointing younger leaders to key roles is bringing fresh energy. Church-school relationships and work in primary schools through programmes such as RE Inspired are strong, and initiatives like LaunchPad are encouraging others to work collaboratively.

There is a responsible financial culture within deaneries that produces a high level of parish share return (96% in 2025).

CHALLENGES

- Encouraging vocations, especially amongst lay people, and seeking to see greater diversity represented across all areas of ministry and leadership



86 stipendiary clergy
27 non-stipendiary clergy



54 Licensed Lay Ministers
85 clergy with Permission to Officiate

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

Christ Church Cathedral is unique in its foundations, which hold the Cathedral and the College of Christ Church together under a single governing body.

Cathedral life and worship is nurtured by a rich sacramental liturgical tradition, with excellent music and a high standard of preaching. This valuable presence within the university is enriched by the contribution of Canon Professors at the interface of spiritual and secular, academic and civic life.

The Cathedral is an increasingly outward-facing community, following a difficult period in its recent history. Since the appointment of the present Dean in 2023, a significant number of new appointments have been made, and the mood of staff and congregations is positive.

The Cathedral recently relaunched its education and pilgrimage work, recognising the challenge of helping its many visitors take the step from tourist to pilgrim.

The Foundation of Christ Church is part way through a root and branch review of governance, which the diocesan bishop and Bishop's Council have been feeding into. This process demands much time, energy and resource, but should lay the basis for effective governance and mission for the next generation.

To serve both diocese and university effectively, the next bishop will provide theological engagement, advocacy for faith to different audiences, and intellectual leadership on contested issues of regional, national and global significance.

They will demonstrate the ability to unite and empower believers within different traditions.

**“As a student in Oxford,
my hope for the next
bishop is one who is
willing and able to put
forward theological
perspectives which see
past these ever-increasing
divisions, and to help
guide the diocese, its
priests and its
congregations into the
loving arms of Christ,
whose call is consistent
and simple: follow me.”**

Contribution from the
Vacancy in See consultation



CHAPLAINCIES

The diocese has around 160 chaplains - lay and ordained, full- and part-time, and volunteers, serving in a surprising number of sectors, including those below.



Anna chaplains



Armed Forces



Arts



Education



Hospitals



Prisons



Sports



Town centre



Waterways

Through the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, a schools' chaplaincy adviser supports development of chaplaincy in primary and secondary schools – not just amongst Church schools but in other trusts and the private sector. Ahead lies the challenge of progressing this work, including resourcing Further Education chaplaincy.

A dedicated diocesan LGBTQIA+ Chaplaincy offers pastoral support, listening and prayer for LGBTQIA+ people and their loved ones.

Our next bishop will work to integrate chaplains as full members of our diocesan family and advocate for chaplains within institutions that face financial constraints or where there is a reduced sense of the need for spiritual care.

SCHOOLS

The diocese serves 283 Church schools, over 21 multi-academy trusts (MATs), across nine local authorities. Together, they educate 68,000 children and young people.

Parishes work closely with local schools and colleges of every kind - including many of the c.1,000 non-Church educational settings across the diocese - serving as governors, leading worship, supporting RE, offering Open the Book, hosting visits to churches, and partnering in community work.

The team within the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE) works with schools and trusts to provide consistent support within a changing educational context. Its current vision is to serve schools in a Christ-like way and to support the flourishing of pupils, staff and leaders.

ODBE recognises that for pupils to flourish, adults in their communities also need to flourish. ODBE's Performance, Resilience and Support Programme has seen strong engagement from more than 130 headteachers and MAT CEOs to date.

ODBE has two diocesan MATs. Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST) serves over 8,000 pupils through 43 Church and community schools across Oxfordshire and Berkshire, with three more due to join this year. Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust (ODBST) covers 14 schools in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, nine of which are Church of England.



Dear Lord,
Thank you for being with us today
and caring for all our schools in the Diocese of Oxford.

As we wait for a new bishop,
please bless the person you are calling to this role.
Help them show enthusiasm, joy, and love,
so it can be seen across all the schools in our diocese.

Give them courage and strength so they do not give up.
Help them to be fair, inclusive, and kind,
to be confident as an individual,
and to be visible so others can see your love through them.

Help them to listen carefully and hear the children's voices,
to value every child,
and to lead with wisdom, hope, and joy.
May they help our schools to grow in faith and love.

Amen.



Written and read by children at
Woodstock CE Primary School



For the first time ever in 2025, 100 students from four Church of England schools attended the diocesan Clergy Conference - leading worship, preaching, and sharing their hopes and concerns for the future.

"I would hope for a bishop with a clear, hopeful vision for ministry with under-18s, recognising their importance in the life and future of the Church. Someone who champions young people, invests in their discipleship, and encourages parishes to prioritise their flourishing would be a tremendous gift."

Contribution from the
Vacancy in See consultation

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Oxford was at the heart of the revival of Anglican Religious Life through the 19th-century Oxford Movement.

Religious communities sprang up in and around Oxford, and five traditional Anglican religious communities are still in existence today - the highest of any diocese in the Church of England.

**The Sisters of the Love of God,
Convent of the Incarnation,
Fairacres, Oxford**

**The Community of St Clare,
St Mary's Convent, Freeland**

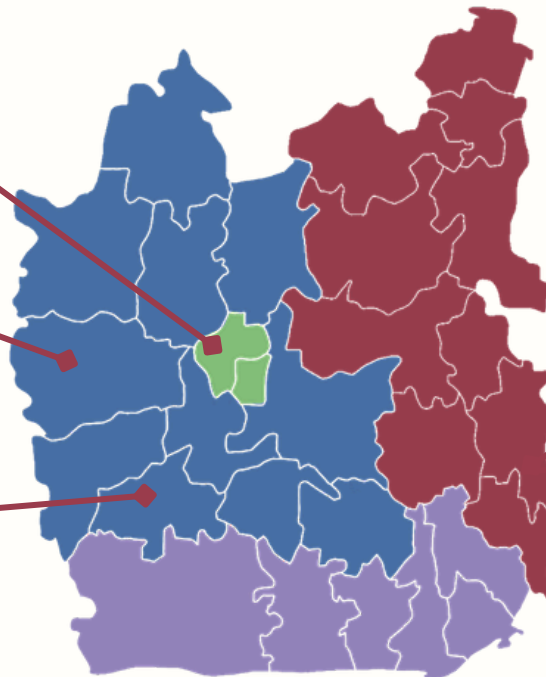
**The Community of
St Mary the Virgin,
St Mary's Convent, Wantage**

Life is centred around the Daily Office and Eucharist. Hospitality is an important and growing ministry, offering space to individuals and groups for retreats and quiet days.

Declining numbers pose an ongoing challenge, sharpening the need to attract new vocations, as does the legacy of large buildings demanding difficult decisions about repurposing or selling.

**The Community of the
Sisters of the Church,
St Michael's Convent,
Gerrards Cross**

**Society of the Precious Blood,
St Michael's Convent,
Gerrards Cross**



CHURCH HOUSE OXFORD

The diocesan staff, primarily based in Church House in Kidlington, provide support in six key areas, each led by a director under the overall leadership of the CEO (Diocesan Secretary).

Senior clergy, directors and the Diocesan Registrar meet monthly as the Bishop's Staff Meeting. The Bishop of Oxford, with the Diocesan Secretary, has a key role in providing overall leadership and making the whole structure cohere optimally.



Communications



Finance



HR and
Safeguarding



Mission and
Ministry



Property



Secretariat





FOUNDATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Every area of mission and ministry holds both strengths to build on and challenges to address. The reflections that follow seek to reflect this lived reality across our diverse diocese.

MISSION AND MINISTRY

Mission and ministry are offered day by day by our churches, communities, chaplaincies and schools, including alongside ecumenical partners. Clergy, lay leaders and volunteers sustain worship, discipleship and service with creativity and resilience.

Area teams and central staff exist to support and enable this work. Parish Development Advisers, working with each area's bishop and archdeacon, support parishes through vacancies and appointment processes, in growing vision for ministry, helping to address administrative burdens, and equipping lay officers.

Our next bishop will foster a culture of prayerful partnership across the diocese, strengthening the relationships sustaining our common life and mission, and encouraging shared ownership of our work with children and young people, new worshipping communities, discipleship, and vocations.

There are many signs of God at work and significant resources to support the Church's calling.

At the same time, many are navigating changing dynamics, particularly in areas of rapid population growth, and discerning where to invest with faith and imagination while stewarding resources sustainably.



Children, young people, and families



Discipleship



New worshipping communities



Vocations and training

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Reading

At All Saints, Dedworth in Windsor, the Vine and Fig Tree café has become a place where everyday hospitality opens the door to conversations about faith. Run by volunteers and operating as a not-for-profit space, the award-winning café welcomes the local community with affordable food, friendship and a place to pause.

As the Revd Paul Walker explains, “There are loads of great cafés in Windsor, but our unique selling point is Jesus... Our aim is to help water the seed of faith.”



Dorchester

At St Mary's, Thame, a Blessings for New Beginnings service offers a simple invitation for people to encounter God's care at key moments in their lives. Children and adults bring school bags, work bags or other items linked to new ventures, receiving prayer and a blessing as they prepare for the season ahead.

This invitational service provides space for the wider community to experience God's encouragement and discover the relevance of the Christian faith in their daily lives.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

Oxford

Through conversation, prayer and activities led in British Sign Language, the local Deaf Church created opportunities for people to encounter the Christian message in ways that were accessible and welcoming at the Oxford Deaf Festival.

Ordained and lay volunteers signed with visitors, answered questions about faith, and offered informal prayer. Their presence helped build relationships and open conversations, demonstrating that the Christian story belongs within every culture and community.



Buckingham

At St Mary the Virgin, Fawley, outdoor prayer has helped reconnect the church with its village. What began as a small gathering in lockdown quickly grew among church members, the wider community, their pets, and now others joining online from further afield. In a village with no pub or hall, the weekly prayers have become an important space for people to meet and reflect together.

Through a simple, visible act of prayer and invitation, St Mary's has created a welcoming space where people can encounter Christian faith and explore its place in life.

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Our ambition is to double the number of children and young people who are active in, and contribute to, God's mission and the life of the Church.

From 2023-25, we worked to secure funding from the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board, but were sadly unsuccessful due to national funding constraints. This was a source of enormous disappointment.

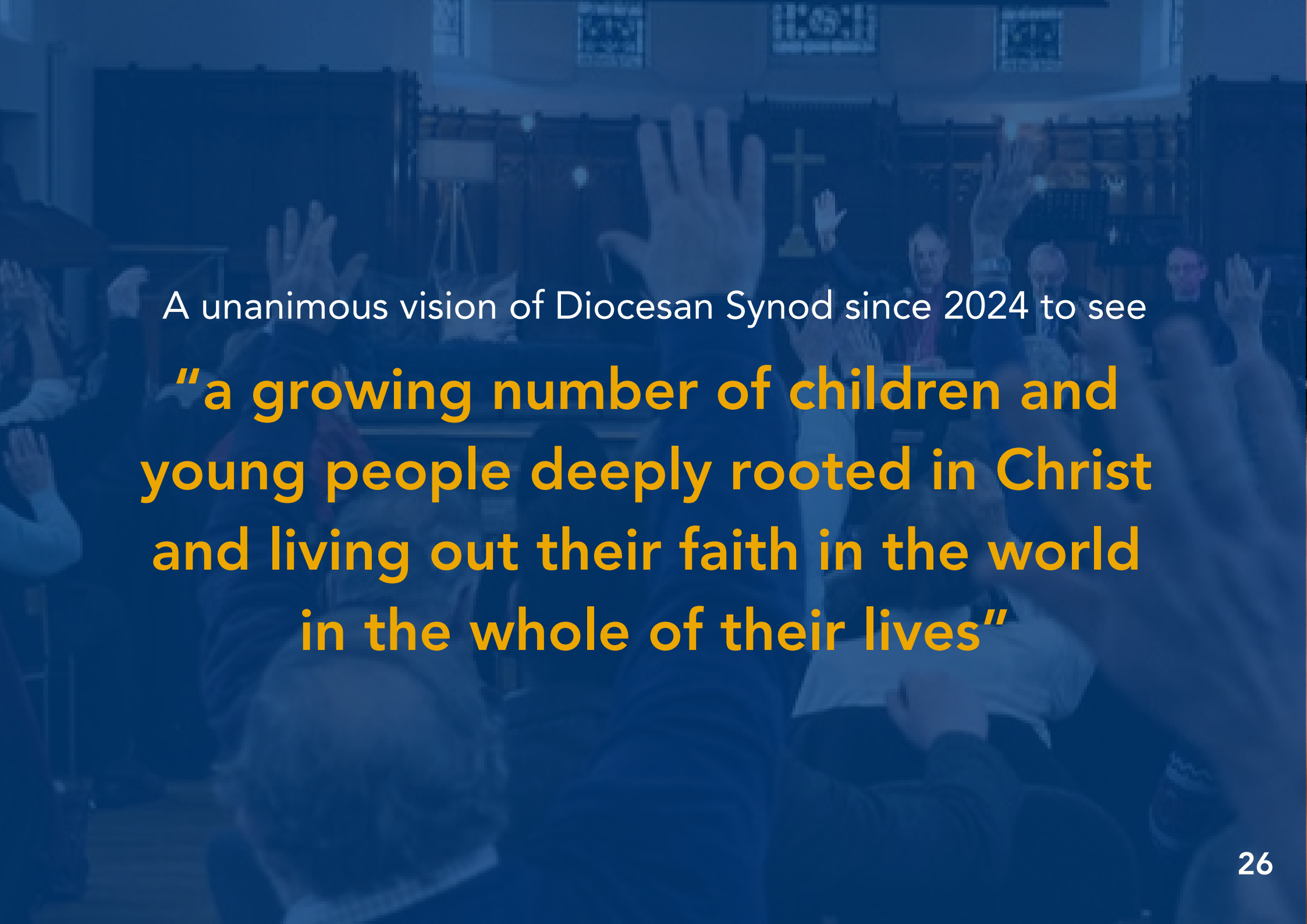
Subsequently, Bishop's Council agreed funding for cross-diocesan level work, supporting our 29 deaneries in developing local plans, and earmarking half of our Development Fund for children and youth mission and ministry.

A Head of Children and Youth Ministry took up post in early 2026, working alongside a capable team of Discipleship Enablers. We are investing in training for clergy, parish workers and lay leaders, and in the development of pioneer hubs to pilot new approaches in each archdeaconry.

We continue to develop the relationship between schools, churches and households. Our contemplative toolkit has been extremely well-received and is in use in over 150 of our schools, as well as across the globe.

Watch how Space Makers helps pupils at Goring CE Primary School navigate the world around them.



A photograph of a church interior, likely during a service. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. In the foreground, the backs of several people's heads and shoulders are visible as they sit in pews. In the background, many people have their hands raised in the air, a common gesture of prayer or praise in a church. A large cross is visible on the wall in the distance. The overall atmosphere is one of active participation and devotion.

A unanimous vision of Diocesan Synod since 2024 to see
"a growing number of children and young people deeply rooted in Christ and living out their faith in the world in the whole of their lives"

DISCIPLESHIP

The diocese faces a wonderful challenge in meeting an increased interest in faith and spirituality, especially amongst young people, and helping them become disciples.

We are looking for a bishop who will speak into this scene and encourage a renewed emphasis on evangelism and on nurturing whole-life learning and spiritual growth across all our churches.

YouShape is a one-year formation journey for young adults who want to grow in faith, explore calling, develop leadership, and discover how their gifts can serve the Church and the world.



Watch a short video explaining more about what these transformative communities can offer.

Research and parochial experience highlights a growing hunger for transcendence, authentic truth and real community in an uncertain and fragmented world. Educational chaplains have also seen an interest in traditional, choral liturgy, including the BCP, and for intellectually informed, scriptural teaching.

Within this diocese people are coming to faith in Jesus, not just through peer connections but also through online research and personal spiritual experience.

Not every church is equipped to meet the challenge of accompanying individuals in their spiritual journeys, of helping them move from interest to belonging, from awe to devotion. Many are welcoming, some have explorer courses, regular baptisms and pathways that encourage informed discipleship, but others need help in meeting this challenge.

NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

SIGNS OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Trinity Earley got to know the newly arrived Hong Kong Christian community settling in Reading in 2021. Now 500 people worship there in Cantonese each week. The Revd Canon Jon Salmon said:

“Trinity very quickly became, in their words ‘a spiritual home’ for the Hong Kongers, and together we are finding friendship. We have been humbled by the generosity of the Hong Kong community and their willingness to volunteer.”



In 2018, Diocesan Synod committed to seeing 750 new congregations established across the diocese. A national grant was secured, a team appointed, and delivery structures created.

This programme did not achieve the scale envisaged, partly because of the pandemic, but also because the vision was not consistently owned at parish level, and the approach was, in places, overly programme-driven rather than rooted in local discernment. We are committed to learning from this as we shape more contextual and locally owned approaches to mission.

However, that national grant is now enabling five Resource Hubs in deliberately different contexts to pioneer mission and share learning with others. These include estate-focused ministry, intercultural mission, and revitalisation projects.

Recently funding has been redirected to support ministry in Cantonese to Hong Kongers in the Reading area, where two further plants are planned for 2026.

VOCATIONS

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Oxford Learning Hub is becoming a key part of how we support formation across the diocese. It hosts our Licensed Lay Minister training and offers a wide range of discipleship resources to help individuals and churches grow in faith and confidence.

Locally Commissioned Ministry pathways complement this provision, enabling churches to shape training around context and mission. Planned developments aim to enhance usability, expand course provision, and deepen collaboration with other dioceses, including global Anglican partners.

The Continuing Ministerial Development programme offers structured support for clergy and lay leaders alike, including theological study days, leadership development, evangelism training, coaching, sabbaticals, retreats and spiritual direction - sustaining ministers for long-term, faithful service.

THE LEARNING HUB - STUDY GROUP COURSES

Termly study groups bring together peer learning, expert teaching, and flexible online study. Here's what our students and tutors say...

"There is always so much to grow into in the abundance of God's love... to do that with a mix of people week by week is great."

"We had quite a diverse group of people, and it was really good to hear everybody's insights. I'm going to do them all! As long as you run these groups, I'm going to do them!"



VOCATIONS

Nurturing callings in lay, ordained and religious life is central to our mission. A sustained shortfall in vocations is one of the most significant pressures facing the diocese.

LAY

God calls people of all backgrounds to live out their faith in their families, communities and workplaces, and in church-based ministry. We seek to honour and equip each of these callings, through our discipleship schemes and programmes supporting those ministering to our congregations.


A revised Licensed Lay Ministry (LLM) programme, launched in 2023, is concluding its initial phase, with 20 people currently in training. The programme was warmly commended in the most recent Periodic External Review, recognising both the quality of formation and the diocese's commitment to lay leadership. Alongside Common Awards pathways (LLM, Ordained Assistant Ministry, and IME2), the authorised ministry scheme releases locally discerned gifts - including preachers, lay funeral ministers, and those licensed to lead Communion by extension.

ORDAINED

In 2025, 20 people were ordained deacon and 18 were ordained priest. In 2024, the diocese piloted the Ministry Development Board's Ordained Assistant Ministry Scheme, now adopted nationally as the Elizabeth Pathway. While the scheme has significant potential to widen access and strengthen ordained ministry, its full impact here is yet to be realised.

Prolonged staff sickness and reduced volunteer capacity have constrained the work of the Vocations team in recent months. Strengthening and stabilising this area is essential if discernment and candidate support are to grow in reach and resilience.

The diocese is committed to the ongoing development of clergy leadership through the national Senior Leadership Learning and Development Programme and other learning pathways.



"I hope for a bishop with a good sense of humour and a willingness to have fun. Ministry is serious work, but joy, laughter, and light heartedness are essential parts of healthy leadership and community life.

A bishop who can smile, join in, and bring warmth to the role would be a real blessing."

Contribution from the
Vacancy in See consultation

THE DEVELOPMENT FUND

Our diocesan Development Fund supports local parish-led projects that are missionally creative, reflect where God is at work in the community, and encourage wider learning.

Oxford

For St Mary's, Messy Church has grown into a thriving community, meeting families at the heart of the Rose Hill estate. One parent of ten said, "This is incredible – for the first time in for ever, all my children are occupied."

The Revd Clare Hayns, vicar, said: "We have established an enthusiastic volunteer team, some of whom are very new to this kind of ministry, but who have found they love it."



Buckingham

Young people at St Paul's Slough recently welcomed local MP Tan Dhesi to their weekly youth community café. The café was started by children, youth and families worker Ola Olanipekun, whose role is funded by the Development Fund, after recognising a lack of safe spaces for teenagers locally.

The group played table tennis with Tan before discussing local issues. Ola said the event helped young people see that "their voices count."

THE DEVELOPMENT FUND

Whilst the Development Fund is administered centrally, the Panel that makes the awards consists of experienced lay and clergy members from across the diocese.



Dorchester

A performance of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* at Dorchester Abbey could lead to more arts workshops for children at the church and missional theatre events in the wider community.

The Revd Jane Willis explained: "Working with a professional opera company, the children learnt a huge quantity. What they achieved was astonishing and powerful... It's a great example of a small grant, big impact."

Reading

A parish nurse scheme is supporting spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing at Reading Gateway Church. Jill Anders began the role in 2023, and the service now has more than 4,000 engagements a year, complementing NHS and social care services with seated fitness classes, lunch clubs, craft groups and more.

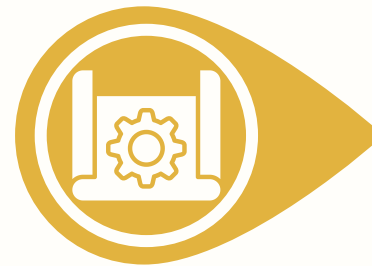
The Revd Nick Hill said: "We want to reach out and support the local community, where the need was... It has revolutionised our pastoral care."



SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat seeks to foster a culture of transparency and ethical engagement, supporting parishes and the diocese in meeting compliance responsibilities and managing risk effectively.

Alongside its oversight of the Development Fund, the team works closely with PCC Secretaries, church officers and other volunteers, providing annual workshops, quarterly updates and responsive governance advice to help parishes navigate regulatory requirements with clarity and confidence.



**35 NEW AND 85
EXISTING PCC
SECRETARIES
TRAINED IN 2025**

THE DEVELOPMENT FUND

296 PROJECTS SUPPORTED

**96 SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP)**



£5.5M GRANTED

£2.7M TO CYP PROJECTS

The Secretariat underpins the formal governance of the diocese - preparing and servicing Synod and Bishop's Council, managing elections and appointments, administering grants, advising PCCs, and ensuring decisions are properly recorded and implemented.

Regulatory and compliance requirements continue to grow, increasing the demands on the team's time and capacity.

CARING FOR AND DEVELOPING OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS

The diocese has more church buildings than any other diocese in the Church of England; these are both an immense joy and a huge challenge.

Caring for and developing our church buildings is central to enabling mission across the diocese. We work to ensure they are safe, sustainable and welcoming, supporting worship, outreach and community life, while balancing heritage care with accessibility and environmental responsibility.

The diocese has a rich heritage, with many buildings of national significance, ensuring strong external partnerships with, for example, Historic England and National Churches Trust. Cherishing heritage has to balance with enabling mission and meeting net-zero commitments. This can make navigating the faculty and permissions processes daunting for parishes.

The Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC) is recognised as an example of best practice in governance, use of delegated authority and the quality of expertise.

The Church Buildings team (most of whom are professionally qualified) give advice to parishes on repairs and improvements and process a very large number of requests for approval under faculty jurisdiction. Requests to the team have approximately doubled in the last two years, and this is causing a major challenge, despite increases in staffing. Consequent delays can understandably cause frustration both to the team and to parishes.



**808 CHURCH
BUILDINGS**

**84% LISTED
BUILDINGS**



**2,441 REQUESTS
IN 2025**



HOUSING AND GLEBE

The Property team seeks to ensure clergy have safe, suitable, sustainable homes, while stewarding glebe land in line with our environmental, social and financial responsibilities.

The scale of a large and ageing housing stock across three counties presents ongoing challenges, particularly in the context of rising repair costs, evolving legislation and increasing sustainability expectations.

Within these pressures, the team works to balance long-term stewardship with the practical realities of clergy life and ministry.

Recent retrofit projects demonstrate a clear commitment to caring for creation and supporting clergy wellbeing. As part of a five-year programme, energy-efficiency improvements - including the installation of air source heat pumps - have been completed in over 100 properties to date, reducing carbon emissions annually by 683 tonnes and helping to lower household energy costs.

The diocese has a portfolio of agricultural, residential and commercial investment property. We seek to be a responsible landlord, taking seriously our responsibilities to all our tenants, and realising development opportunities where we can, maximising returns to further the work of Christ in and through the diocese.

THE LARGEST HOUSING AND GLEBE PORTFOLIO OF ALL DIOCESES IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND



ALMOST 500 PROPERTIES

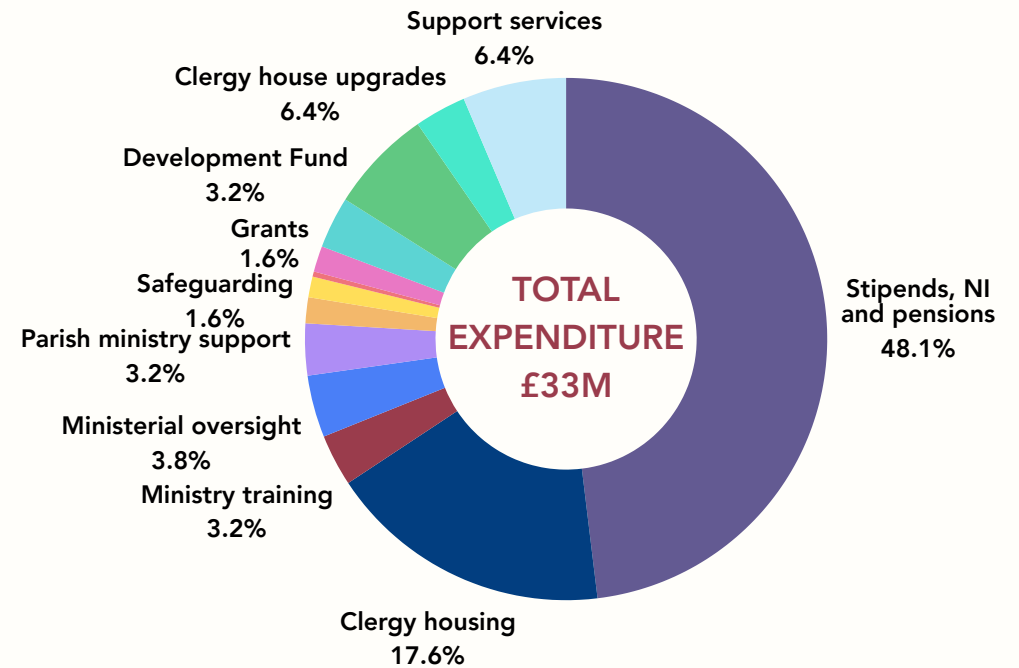
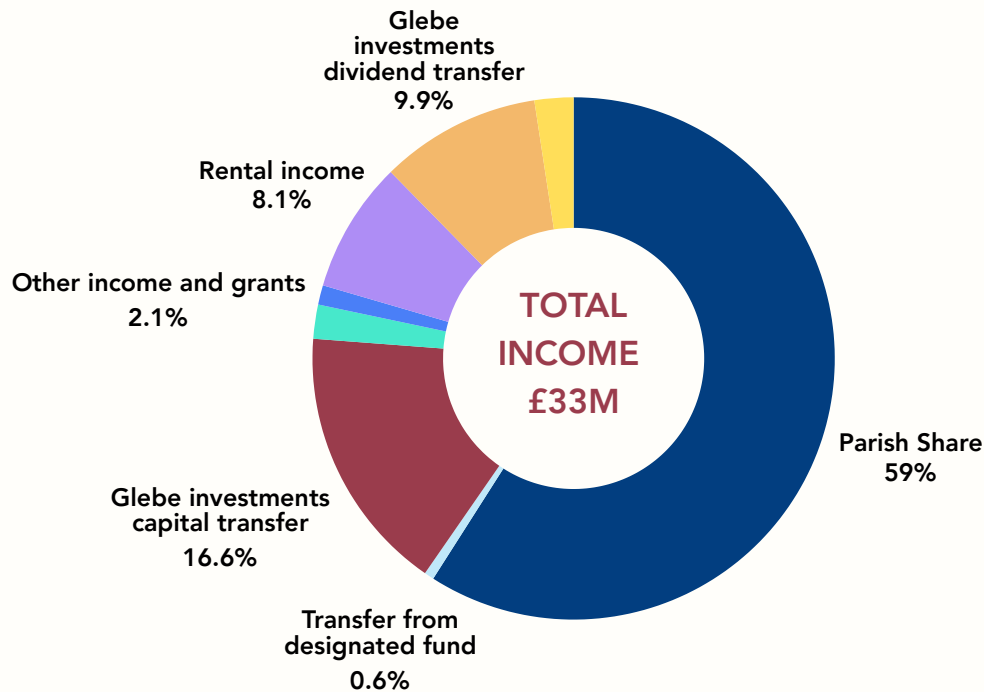
OVER 4,000 ACRES OF LAND



RESOURCES

The Diocese of Oxford has a budgeted income of £33m for 2026, the second highest in the Church of England after London. Around 60% comes from Parish Share, with most remaining income drawn from glebe investments under a total return policy.

Reserves exceed three months' expenditure, and the five-year forecast indicates relative stability. Expenditure for 2026 is budgeted at approximately £33m, matching total income, supporting 301 stipendiary clergy FTEs and 82.4 diocesan staff FTEs.



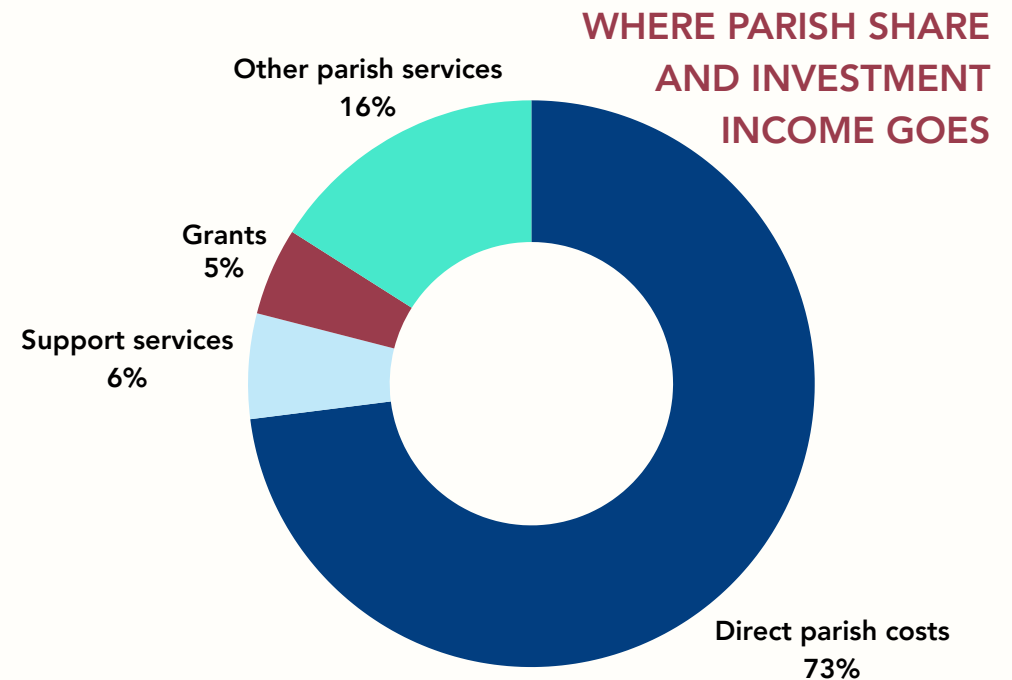
RESOURCES

Our ability to sustain the current level of ministry depends on the continued generosity of Parish Share givers. Parish Share primarily recovers the direct costs of ministry, with deaneries determining clergy numbers locally and enabling mutual support between parishes. Around 94% has been received in recent years, maintaining the overall monetary value, but pressure across the system is increasing.

While we remain hopeful that growth in church attendance and engagement will expand our giving community, we recognise the need to re-envision how we resource ministry across the diocese in shared conversation with parishes, the wider diocesan community and the national Church.

Resources are not confined to those held at diocesan level. In 2024, parish income totalled £70.5m, with aggregate reserves of £108m, though this includes restricted funds and masks significant variation.

Around 7% of parishes hold minimal reserves and many others face acute financial pressure, creating a dual challenge: finding effective ways to support parishes struggling financially - many of which are small and rural - while also investing in the mission opportunities presented by significant new housing growth across the diocese.



PEOPLE

All people contribute to building God's kingdom. As we support this shared ministry, there is a growing recognition that we must continue working to ensure that all feel welcome and enabled to flourish.

The HR team works alongside bishops, clergy and diocesan teams to promote healthy relationships and sustainable patterns of ministry and employment. This includes developing person-centred approaches to supporting clergy, staff and volunteers, and offering guidance to parishes on recruitment, volunteer management and healthy working relationships.

Our next bishop will play an important role in modelling a culture of belonging, encouraging healthy relationships, and supporting the wellbeing of all who share and serve in Church life.

In Church House and across the diocese, we seek to foster a culture of belonging, diversity, creativity and fulfilment, expressed through our commitment to clergy wellbeing, safeguarding, equality, and learning to live together faithfully amid difference.



Wellbeing



Equality, diversity and inclusion



Healthy relationships



Recruitment, retention and performance

WELLBEING

It is not just the wellbeing of clergy that is a significant challenge - the wellbeing of parishes more widely also needs attention. Together, we face some common challenges.



Ageing church congregations



Mental health challenges, particularly among young people



Isolation and loneliness, particularly among the elderly



Volunteer fatigue



Engaging children and young people with the church and in discipleship



Resource challenges of finances, people, and buildings, particularly in multi-parish benefices

Despite significant strides to address clergy wellbeing at national and diocesan level, there remains a challenge as priestly ministry contends with wider Church expectations. The wellbeing of clergy is crucial to the health of the church, and the last six years in particular have been testing for clergy in and following the pandemic.

Many clergy express concern about increasing administrative responsibilities which don't sit well with their understanding of priestly vocation. Other pressures on wellbeing of parishes and clergy include changing demographics, the impact of technology, isolation in parishes, and being encouraged to explore new ways of engaging in mission and ministry when resource may feel limited.

There continues to be a need for a healthy balance of prayer, work and rest, modelled by the bishop.

WELLBEING

Meanwhile church officers speak of the stress of 'keeping the show on the road'.

This is felt particularly in supporting parish clergy or holding a vacancy, maintaining or increasing financial income, caring for buildings, and delivering on high safeguarding standards; all as congregations may be dwindling, capable volunteer numbers are reducing, and in the midst of challenging theological differences.

Whilst benefices are in vacancy, church officers are left with significant additional responsibilities - and difficulties are felt most keenly in those parishes with one or no churchwardens.

With approximately one third of clergy in each area expected to retire in the next ten years, there is a compelling challenge to ensure that benefices in the diocese remain attractive to potential incumbents.

An ageing population, financial challenges and the difficulty of attending well to those of different theological traditions through the Living in Love and Faith process has led to a fragility of some relationships, including between bishop, clergy, congregations, and Church House.

Our next Bishop of Oxford, as a focus of unity, has a particular role in building trust.



DIVERSITY

The diocese is committed to ensuring everyone has a voice at the table, based on a theological conviction about each person's inclusion in the Body of Christ. However, many groups are not represented well within organisational structures, particularly within leadership, leaving a tendency to talk 'about' rather than 'with'. We acknowledge that different types of privilege can determine whose experiences are treated as the norm and whose barriers remain unseen.

We established an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee in 2025, providing strategic focus and connecting work on participation, representation and inclusion more clearly across the life of the diocese. Alongside this, a renewed approach to EDI staffing is supporting a more joined-up vision, enabling better engagement with the intersections between different aspects of diversity, and equipping others across the diocese to share in this important work.

Some progress is being made in developing policies and practices of inclusion of those with disabilities, but there is an increasing need for mentoring, education and awareness of the gifts that disabled, neurodivergent, D/deaf and hard of hearing people bring to the Church.

The diocese serves communities that range from among the most economically well-off to the most economically deprived in England, often within sight of each other. This presents challenges to resourcing ministry as we seek to extend our impact beyond middle class communities.

Our diocesan Low-Income Communities Network supports clergy, lay leaders, pioneers and ministry teams whose calling is rooted in places shaped by economic hardship, social inequality, and complex community challenges.

DIVERSITY

Each bishop has an Adviser for Women's Ministry, and the diocese has a thriving network of women clergy. Feedback shows that micro-aggressions and misogyny are live issues that have an impact on wellbeing of ministers and staff. We look for active support from the bishop to enable the greater flourishing of both lay and ordained women.

Whilst there has been some progress, there is still much to be done in enabling congregations to cohere and in developing vocations across diversity.

We pray for a bishop who will encourage a sense of belonging that genuinely embraces all and who pays close attention to the positive and negative experiences of all the different groups reflected within the Church and society. We hope for a courageous bishop who will champion those less represented in our leadership and structures, encouraging them to flourish where they are and to apply for senior roles.

THE FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Diocese of Oxford is seeking a bishop who will ordain both women and men.

The diocese is committed to the Five Guiding Principles contained in the House of Bishops' Declaration (2014).

We seek to live out the challenge that they 'need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively' and doing so in a way that fosters 'mutual flourishing across the whole of the Church of England' and 'maintains the highest possible degree of communion'.

'Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests'; GS Misc 1076

FROM LAMENT TO ACTION

One strand of this important work is our ongoing response to the From Lament to Action report. The number of UKME members of Diocesan Synod and on Bishop's Council has grown. The diocese established the Church of England's first diocesan UKME Chapter, now numbering 31 clergy and LLMs, offering an important support network.

Unconscious racial bias training has been delivered to bishops' staff, boards and parishes, and added to the IME2 pathway, with work underway to equip the UKME Chapter to support wider dissemination. The diocesan programme has been adopted by several theological education institutions nationwide.

Since 2024, ODBE has expanded its training offer to all Church schools to include sessions on courageous advocacy and exploring Christianity as a globally diverse faith. There is a growing need to better equip and enable parish mission and ministry among younger generations, ensuring that the gifts and voices of the whole community are recognised and valued.

Further challenges remain in relation to vocations, in ensuring that people from UKME backgrounds are actively supported to discern and nurture their calling. This includes strengthening pathways into ministry, improving visibility at parish level, and providing ongoing support.



HUMAN SEXUALITY

Perhaps to a greater extent than many other dioceses, Oxford is highly engaged in the debate on human sexuality.

We are aware of, and live with, the polarisation of the debate, and a misrepresentation of opposing views.

Between the polarities, there is a spectrum of views. For some, how human sexuality is expressed physically is a first order, or salvation, issue. For some, the doctrine that marriage is between one man and one woman, for life, is central. For some, expressing clearly God's full and equal acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people, and their relationships, is a Gospel imperative. For some, the possibility of people in same-sex civil marriages being ordained is a key issue.

Views on human sexuality are sincerely held and arise from particular understandings of scripture and mission. Churches on every side of the debate express their commitment to their welcome of LGBTQIA+ people, but this welcome is not always experienced.

On every side of this debate, people feel real hurt. Some have found it impossible to continue serving in their church, or even to continue to belong to it.

A small number of PCCs have made the decision to route their parish share through the Ephesian Fund, or the Oxford Good Stewards Trust. Some of those, and others, withhold a proportion of their parish share.

There are also many people within the diocese who are indifferent to the debate, or confused about it, or frustrated and bewildered by the time, energy and cost expended on it.

Many people, on all sides of the debate, and beyond the Church, long for focus to be given to other pressing matters within the life of the diocese and of the Church nationally.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

We need our next diocesan bishop to foster unity and love in the midst of difference, and to be the chief pastor of all people wherever they find themselves in this debate.

It is essential that the bishop is able to facilitate dialogue and to build trust with all in the diocese, ensuring that everyone's views are respected as a matter of conscience, and proportionate accommodation made for them.

Contributions from the consultation illustrate the breadth of views.

"The church needs to be more inclusive, allowing same-sex marriages and the marriage of same-sex reverends too. Because surely God is open to everyone and loves all... Jesus taught us to love and not exclude so why, at the top of the Anglican Christian Church do we not set a good example and allow all."

"My primary hope is a bishop who will lead the church with courage and faithful obedience to the Bible... who will prioritise our historic understanding and practice, particularly on matters of sexuality and gender... a bishop who can resist external pressures to move away from these biblical foundations..."

SAFEGUARDING

We are committed to creating a culture in which safeguarding is embraced as a shared responsibility across the whole Church. Strong foundations have been established, but embedding this at every level holistically is a continuous and vital task.

Nearly 500 volunteer Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) serve their communities with care and commitment, in strong partnership with the diocesan team. Around 55 PSO posts are vacant. Capacity can be a significant challenge for the diocesan safeguarding team, particularly in relation to complex cases.

The diocesan bishop carries responsibility both to be accountable and to hold others to account, engaging seriously and transparently with the complexity of safeguarding cases. Through clear and nuanced leadership, the bishop will create, embed and inhabit a safer diocese for all - setting a tone in which safeguarding is integral to decision-making, vigilance is sustained, and complacency has no place.

Workload pressures can be considerable, and expectations about what safeguarding can and cannot provide are sometimes difficult to manage.

The diocesan team works collaboratively with victims and survivors through the Oxford Survivor Group and the diocesan Chaplaincy for Survivors. Work with these groups is invaluable in enabling lived experience to inform practice, and their powerful contributions to events such as Safeguarding Sunday make a meaningful impact on the life and work of the diocese.

The INEQE independent audit recognised well-established arrangements, effective governance and a knowledgeable, well-led team. In the past five to six years, the diocese has undertaken several Lessons Learned reviews of national significance, underlining the necessity of ongoing learning at both parish and diocesan level. Oversight is strengthened through a Safeguarding Panel providing independent scrutiny, alongside a Quality Assurance group which dip-samples cases to test consistency and decision-making.

COMMUNICATIONS

We are called to proclaim the gospel and to bear faithful witness in every community.

Clear, confident communication is therefore integral to parish ministry and to episcopal leadership.

The Communications team works closely with bishops and parishes in moments of complexity and crisis. Strategic advice, media handling and out-of-hours guidance help ensure that local ministry is sustained and public engagement approached with care.

Bishops, clergy and laity are supported to have a distinctive voice at local, national and international level. The team have strong press relations in each county, and media training is offered to curates and incumbents.

In-house data analysis strengthens this work by identifying patterns and pressures across the diocese, offering parish-level insight to inform both local strategy and wider decision-making.

Alongside this, digital communication and digital evangelism are a growing part of our mission. We seek to proclaim the gospel in the digital spaces where many, especially children and young people, already gather, while equipping parishes to do the same with confidence and care.

Feedback consistently shows an appetite among parishioners to hear directly from their bishop in accessible and invitational ways, through initiatives such as Come and See.

Our next bishop will communicate Jesus across parish life - particularly with and among young people - and in the wider public and media landscape, on and offline, with confidence and clarity, shaped by their own authentic character and gifts.

THE FLOURISHING OF THE RURAL CHURCH

Here, we define rural parishes as relatively small, with a low population, set within a natural landscape. Their communities can be tightly knit, with strong social bonds and a shared identity. By this definition, well over 50% of our parishes are rural.

Rural churches are often part of multi-parish benefices with limited clergy resource, a smaller volunteer base, and historic buildings needing significant investment. Although there are challenges, there is also hope. Rural churches are often vibrant centres of their communities.

The Diocese of Oxford is particularly well placed to support a renewal of rural church life. Clergy numbers remain relatively high by national standards. In addition, while the traditional rural economy, particularly farming, is under pressure, tourism and recreation are also significant features, particularly in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which has over two million people living within a 30-minute drive.

The growth of home working and the proximity of some rural parishes to expanding urban centres are also bringing additional energy and diversity into these communities. These factors mean that many of our rural parishes are more dynamic, prosperous, and younger in profile than is often assumed.

Supporting and valuing the volunteer base is critical, especially as church officers often serve multiple roles, and maintaining our bishops' practice of visiting even the most remote parishes is crucial to this agenda. Vocation and training for rural ministry need to be prioritised and the barriers to training in a rural context removed.

These challenges require imaginative, knowledgeable and empathetic leadership. Our rural communities need a bishop who is not only a spiritual leader, but also a visible advocate who encourages and champions the distinctive life and mission of rural churches.

MILTON KEYNES

Milton Keynes is the largest population centre in the diocese and growing fast - an expected population of around 500,000 by 2050 will place MK in the UK's top 20 largest cities.

Growth is supported by East-West Rail plans to connect MK with Oxford and ultimately Cambridge. The Oxford-Cambridge Arc is becoming a focus for regional industrial and housing development, and MK will ultimately stretch beyond present diocesan boundaries. The population is 178% of Oxford, with only 48% of the stipendiary clergy posts. MK hosts two resourcing hubs, funded by the diocese and the national Strategic Development Fund.

MK is an ecumenical city by design. For 75% of residents, living in newly developed areas, their parish church is part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership. This has a rich history but can be a source of dysfunction.

An MK Strategy Group, led by the Bishop of Buckingham, is working on a ten-year strategy to bring growth to the city. The diocese is preparing substantial investment and a national funding bid in 2029.

KEY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES



Overstretched clergy



Invisible church buildings and activities, partly due to local geography



Ageing church populations despite young local demographic



Decline in church attendance acutely heightened by scale and pace of city growth/development



Inherited church governance in some parishes that is stifling mission

"No place forgotten - especially Milton Keynes"

Contribution from the
Vacancy in See consultation

MILTON KEYNES DEANERY



13 parishes
31 church buildings
24 in ecumenical parishes



250,000 population
4,700 - 52,000 people per parish

13 MARCH
CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE CHURCH
In 1992, HM The Queen attended the opening of
Christ the Cornerstone Church, the first city centre
ecumenical church in the UK.

15 JUNE 1916
ALBERT FRENCH

Age 16, killed in action, Ploegsteert Wood,
Belgium, 'K' Company, 18th Battalion, King's Royal
Liverpool Fusiliers, 22 August 1916, 1st World War.

1 NOVEMBER 1990

RESPONDING WELL TO NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Across our three counties, there are significant levels of new housing development, particularly in MK, Reading, Bracknell, Banbury, and the areas surrounding Oxford.

Some of this new housing has been warmly received by existing communities. Other developments have met resistance, as residents feel they may change local identity, or have concerns about the wider lack of supporting infrastructure for new housing estates.

Current plans indicate approximately 40,000 new homes in Oxfordshire, 55,000 in Buckinghamshire, and 22,000 in Berkshire.

Our next bishop will need to be aware of the tensions between new housing and existing communities, and act as a bridge-builder between long-established residents and new communities across the diocese.

See how St Frideswide's, Water Eaton, worked with residents of a new housing estate to secure pedestrian access from the local council, pursuing justice together for their communities.





BEING SALT AND LIGHT

To be a Christ-like Church is to live as salt and light, supporting the transformation of God's world. In recent years this has been expressed through key priorities, including care for creation and addressing poverty and inequality.

These are now woven into the ordinary rhythm of diocesan life, as we look ahead to fresh discernment and direction in a new season of leadership.

CARING FOR COMMUNITIES

Faith in action calls us to love and serve our neighbours and help shape communities where all can flourish.

This calling is lived out daily in our parishes as they work to meet the unique needs of their communities.

From curry nights for those in temporary accommodation and recipe boxes for schoolchildren and their families, to Christians Against Poverty debt centres and Reclaim the Night and White Ribbon events, churches across the diocese stand alongside those on the margins, helping to foster communities in which all are welcomed and valued.

At a diocesan level, this commitment has also found expression through wider partnerships and co-ordinated action: campaigning with Citizens UK for structural change, and mobilising churches to rehome Ukrainian refugees at the outset of the war. Together, these local, ecumenical and diocesan responses reflect a shared vocation to embody Christ's compassion and justice in the world.



CARING FOR CREATION

We seek to honour God's creation by weaving environmental responsibility through the life of our churches, schools and institutions.

This work creates opportunities to bring together parishioners, external partners, link dioceses and national teams, to share their heart for God's world and inspire one another to act.

The Church House Environment team supports parishes through the Eco Church framework and co-ordinates progress towards net-zero carbon by 2035. We are midway through implementing a £10m Synod commitment to move clergy housing towards net zero. In 2022, an optional commissioning prayer was added to baptism and confirmation services, affirming stewardship of creation as integral to Christian discipleship.

Parishes face many competing pressures and, without local capacity, funding and leadership, creation care can slip down the list of priorities.

Net zero is not always readily understood as part of mission and ministry; it can be perceived as a secular or resource-intensive agenda rather than an expression of faithful witness.

Embedding creation care within the whole of our mission remains an ongoing and necessary task.



**33% REGISTERED
ECO CHURCHES**

**17% RECEIVED
AN AWARD**



**BRONZE ECO
DIOCESE**

“RECONNECTING WITH THE PLANET”

Students and leaders of all faiths met together at the second inter-faith eco-conference at Slough & Eton Church of England Business and Enterprise College.

Bishop Mary opened the day reflecting on our connection to the planet from a Christian perspective. She was followed by Seeta Lakhani, who explored Hindu understandings of humanity’s responsibilities towards the earth. Later, students heard from Dr Mohamed Kharbouch, who shared a Muslim perspective on care for creation.

A highlight was the presentation of students’ digital poster art responding to the climate crisis. Supported by David Sparrow of Art Beyond Belief, students from the college, Grove Academy, St Bernard’s Catholic Grammar School and Eden Girls’ School showcased work combining creativity with urgent reflection.

Bishop Mary said: “It was humbling to consider carefully the question the students put to us: *‘What are you afraid of?’*”

Father Scott, from the Oxford Diocesan Committee for Interfaith Relations, added: “If we are going to address the global environmental crisis then world faiths need to work together – and they can. Young people bring insight and clarity to these issues, and we saw that throughout the day.”



ENGAGING WITH OTHER FAITHS

Building understanding, friendship and shared action across our diverse communities.

Following the Church of England's Presence and Engagement strategy, diocesan interfaith advisers within each episcopal area support parishes and area teams, whilst leading on diocesan initiatives through the Committee on Interfaith Relations.

We have enjoyed strong interfaith relations for many years, particularly through the introduction of the Thames Valley and Area Faith and Civic Leaders Forum. Community cohesion has been a priority throughout the Israel/Palestine conflict and the wider war in the Middle East, in response to increased pressures on religious groups through marginalisation and hate crime.

Our next diocesan bishop will continue to take a leading role in this work and utilise the convening potential of that role in supporting faith communities.

Our interfaith work has significant pockets in certain urban settings (High Wycombe, Slough, Reading, Banbury, Milton Keynes and Oxford) but less impact in predominantly rural communities.

Involvement in community vigils are poignant moments of solidarity between civic and religious groups.



BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

For many years, the diocese has made a visible contribution to national life, shaped in part by the public roles and interests of its bishop.

Our next bishop will have a desire and ability to speak into the national sphere on issues that matter to the Church and society. The particular focus of that contribution will depend upon that bishop's calling.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE NATIONAL CHURCH

The diocese takes seriously its responsibilities as part of a national Church and is committed to contributing the perspective that comes from being such a complex and diverse diocese.

We are actively engaged in national structures, with senior clergy and diocesan staff serving on national committees and steering groups, and many of our 21 General Synod members speaking regularly in Synod and contributing to its work between sessions.

Over the years, the diocese has also developed a range of resources that have been shared with, and adapted by, other dioceses with our support.

Successive Bishops of Oxford have held a number of national portfolios, enabling them to contribute in areas best aligned to their gifts and calling. These have included lead bishop for education, lead bishop for AI and technology, Co-Chair of the Anglican Communion Science Commission, and membership of the Living in Love and Faith Programme Board, among others.



INTERNATIONAL MISSION PARTNERS

The diocese enjoys partnerships with four Anglican dioceses: Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, Kimberley and Kuruman in South Africa, Nandyal in India, and Växjö in Sweden.

Supported by visits and online gatherings, these links enable us to locate ourselves within the Anglican Communion, to learn from one another, and to pray for one another. We have piloted joint online training for our curates and work together on shared priorities such as care for creation and children and young people.

Many of our parishes have their own long-standing links to mission partners and show a deep commitment to the worldwide Church.

In some of our communities, the worldwide nature of the Christian Church is seen in ethnically diverse congregations. St Paul's in Slough is the diocese's Intercultural Mission and Ministry Resourcing Hub.

The Partners in World Mission group co-ordinates and promotes our work with international mission partners and is now working to promote understanding of the worldwide Church across the diocese, as well as better highlighting the work of individual parishes.

"We are praying for a bishop who, at the core of their ministry, balances the tensions, challenges, and opportunities of both the local church and the global Church, fostering a spirit of genuine mutuality and partnership where relationships are valued and nurtured in our collective call to be God's face in God's world."

Bishop Brian Marajh, Kimberley & Kuruman

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence is transforming society in ways the Church cannot ignore. We must engage wisely with what it means to be human before God in a technological age.

We sit within one of the most significant science corridors in the country. This gives the diocese a particular opportunity and responsibility to engage thoughtfully with these developments.

AI presents opportunities for engagement as well as disruption. Used wisely, it may ease administrative burdens for clergy and church officers, releasing time for prayer, pastoral care and mission. It may open new spaces for formation and connection, including breaking down language barriers.

AI is also shaping how people explore life's deeper questions. Increasing numbers turn to digital tools for information, reflection and conversation. This creates new intersections with ministry, as churches encounter people who are already wrestling with questions of meaning, purpose and faith in an online environment.

However, there are wider ethical questions. The energy and water demands of AI infrastructure have implications for the climate and the Church's commitment to care for creation. Ongoing debates about copyright and the use of authors' work to train AI systems remain unresolved. There are also emerging concerns about the impact of AI on education and the cultivation of deep learning, particularly for younger generations.

As a diocese, we must grow in digital and theological literacy, equipping clergy and laity to engage with wisdom rather than fear. Each parish will need to discern where AI serves the gospel and where restraint is required. Patience and grace will be needed as we learn together. In every context, we must pay careful attention to safeguarding, data ethics and the protection of vulnerable people.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Through prayer, consultation and careful discernment, but open to surprise, we seek our next Bishop of Oxford.

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US

More than 2,500 people shared their thoughts. After extensive analysis, ten key areas emerged: some, issues for the next bishop to address, others, qualities they should offer.



Holiness and spirituality



Growth through sharing the gospel



Pastoral leadership and active listening



Theological and intellectual depth



Courage and conviction



Support for rural churches



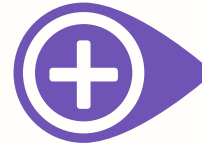
Division and unity



Relevance of church to wider society



Faithfulness to the scriptures



Inclusion

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US

People across the diocese were invited to share their hopes for the future, the challenges facing us, and the characteristics they would wish to see in a new diocesan bishop.

Following four weeks of consultation and detailed analysis, we received 2,555 responses from adults, including 60 submitted on behalf of groups, and 148 responses to the under-18 questions. The key consultation questions were open-text, without prompts. The results highlight the themes most frequently raised across all questions.

A RANGE OF VOICES

Of those adults who completed the demographic questions:

- 87% attend church weekly
- 57% identified as female, 43% as male, fewer than 1% as non-binary
- 5% identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community
- 17% identified as having a disability or being neurodivergent
- 96% identified as being from a white ethnic background

OUR QUESTIONS FOR ADULTS:

- What are your hopes for the diocese, especially the churches in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire?
- What are the challenges facing the diocese?
- What particular three characteristics would you want in the person called to be our new bishop?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us as we discern who God is calling?

OUR QUESTIONS FOR UNDER-18s:

- What should our new bishop be like? Please use three words.
- What do you think will be the hardest thing our new bishop will have to do?
- What do you think the new bishop's first tasks might be? Please tell us up to three things.
- What else would you like to tell us about your hopes for our new bishop?

“My hope is that our next Diocesan Bishop will bring a bold and imaginative vision for the future of our diocese, particularly in the area of ministry with children and young people.

Under-18s are not just the church of tomorrow but a vital part of the church today, and I long for a bishop who recognises this and invests in nurturing their faith, their gifts, and their place within our communities.”

“My hope is that the diocese would be lifted up in God’s timing - not through human strategy alone, but through faithful obedience, prayerful dependence, and joyful confidence in God’s promises, trusting that He who has been faithful in the past will continue to bless His people in the years ahead.”

“My hopes for the diocese are that they continue to be led by kind, understanding, supportive leaders...

That the many and varied processes the diocese carries out are reviewed and streamlined to reduce the admin burden on everyone.”

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD US

UNDER-18s

What should our new bishop be like? Please use three words.



This word cloud shows the individual words that occur most frequently in the 148 responses to this question from under-18s. Please note this is a much smaller sample size.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Ever open to the call of God, and the ways in which God surprises us, we are seeking a Bishop of Oxford who is:

- **a lover of the Gospel**, shaping their own life and that of the diocese around the story of God's redeeming love for humanity;
- **a person of considerable resilience**, sustained and upheld by a spiritual life of depth, who rejoices in and draws upon their dependence on God;
- **someone secure in their identity in Christ**, who is prepared to make themselves known to those in their care, and so build up the community of the diocese through relationship and love;

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. I KNOW MY OWN AND MY OWN KNOW ME..."

John 10.14

"YOU CANNOT BEAR THE WEIGHT OF THIS CALLING IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH, BUT ONLY BY THE GRACE AND POWER OF GOD."

The Ordinal

- **a visible and courageous leader**, both within the Church and beyond it, who shapes a godly culture within the diocese and sets a clear direction, drawing others to that vision;
- **a strong collaborator** who, recognising their own weaknesses, draws on the strengths of others, values teamwork and is able to balance leadership and delegation amongst lay and ordained colleagues;

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

- a **tender and attentive pastor**, who nourishes the people in their care with wisdom and imagination;
- **blessed with wisdom and curiosity**, with the ability to reflect deeply and theologically;
- a **talented communicator**, able to converse with small children and academics alike; with local parishes, and with the national press; with established Christians and with people exploring faith, or with those who have no faith;
- **servant-hearted**, after the pattern of Jesus Christ who emptied himself for the sake of those whom he came to save;

"THE THIEF COMES ONLY TO STEAL AND KILL AND DESTROY. I CAME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY."

John 10.10

"GIVE THEM HUMILITY, THAT THEY MAY USE THEIR AUTHORITY TO HEAL, NOT TO HURT; TO BUILD UP, NOT TO DESTROY."

The Ordinal

- a **skilled reconciler**, committed to drawing different parts of the diocese into ever closer relationship, and to brokering neighbourliness across the communities we serve;
- an **inspirational evangelist, teacher and preacher**, eager to share the Gospel;
- **committed to embedding** a holistic safeguarding culture across the diocese;
- **passionate about those on the margins of society**, and about championing the inclusion of those under-represented in church structures.

Those exploring God's call to be Bishop of Oxford will do so aware that as God calls, so God equips and in grace meets their weakness with strength (*2 Corinthians 12.9*). Reliant on the Holy Spirit, they will be able to describe how they are growing towards each of the qualities or skills described here. Some will be drawing upon considerable parish experience; others upon significant sector ministry.

Whatever their own experience, they will be able to show deep appreciation for the complexity of each of the communities and contexts across the diocese, speaking into them with sustained pastoral care, godly wisdom and prophetic insight.

As we continue to pray for all those considering their call to join us, and to lead us, we are also praying that God will reveal the person called to be our next Bishop of Oxford.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for all the bishops who have cared for your Church and for the love and guidance they have shared.

As we prepare to welcome a new Bishop of Oxford, please guide everyone involved in choosing the right person. Help them make wise choices with kindness and care.

Please bless the person you are calling to this role. Help them to be kind, respectful, and fair, a strong, brave leader who leads with love and listens to others.

Thank you for giving children places to worship and pray, where we can feel safe, loved, and close to you. Help us to respect one another and to choose love, always.

Help our new bishop to continue bringing communities together, to help people stand side by side, and show respect for all religions and people.

May our school be filled with peace, understanding, and hope. Amen.



Written and read by children at
St Leonard's CE Primary School



 **DIOCESE** *of*
OXFORD

Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance

Company No. 142978 | Charity No. 247954 | VAT No. 630 6345 61

Registered office: Church House Oxford, Langford Locks, Kidlington, Oxford OX5 1GF