

DIOCESE OF OXFORD ANNUAL REVIEW

MAY 2024



DIOCESE *of*
OXFORD

The Diocese of Oxford is the Church of England in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Together, we are the Church, called and sent by God as disciples of Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. We are a living, growing network of more than a thousand congregations, chaplaincies and schools.

Together, we are called to be more Christ-like; to be the Church of the Beatitudes: contemplative, compassionate and courageous for the sake of God's world.

Together, we work with God and with others for the common good in every place in one of the great crossroads of the world.

Together, we are called to proclaim the Christian faith afresh in this generation with joy and hope and love.

Together, we are called to dream dreams and see visions of what could be and see those visions come to birth.

oxford.anglican.org/common-vision

RESPONDING TOGETHER



Rowan Lake

Over the last year, the Diocese of Oxford has continued to respond to the dramatic events which are reshaping our world. Many people across the diocese have been involved in welcoming refugees from Ukraine and Hong Kong; our interfaith teams have been working closely with faith leaders across the three counties to counter extremism and hate.

We have made significant steps forward in our journey towards net zero carbon and environmental work and in combatting poverty and exclusion locally. We hosted a visit from the Archbishop of the West Indies as part of the Windrush anniversary celebrations and continued to deepen our work on racial justice. This is all a vital part of what it means to be a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world: more contemplative, compassionate and courageous.

The diocese continued our long recovery from the pandemic thanks to the hard work and generosity of so many people. We saw significant growth in our congregations for a second year, for which we give thanks. Our church schools continue to educate more than 60,000 children and young people each week. We launched our new learning hub for disciples and ministers. Finances were stable,

and there are many more new building projects in churches. Debates have continued across the diocese and nationally around the blessing of same-sex couples. We have continued to keep safeguarding at the heart of all we seek to do.

The year saw the appointment of the first female Dean of Christ Church as Sarah Foot took up her role in July. There was deep shock and sadness in February following the unexpected death of Bishop Alan, who served as Bishop of Buckingham for over 20 years.

The pages that follow highlight some of the achievements of our Church House and area office staff, committees, and councils. They work for every congregation, church, church school, parish and benefice.

May God bless you in your Christian service for the year ahead.

+ Steven.

The Rt Revd Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

Mark

Canon Mark Humphriss, Diocesan Secretary

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

James Dwyer



May

Bishop Gavin visits world mission partners in the Church of South India.



Ian Wallman|Christ Church, Peter Moger

August

The Revd Canon Peter Moger appointed as Sub-Dean of Christ Church Oxford (August), following the Very Revd Prof Sarah Foot's licensing as Dean (July).

Hannah Mann



June

We host three care for creation events, equipping churches to respond to the climate and ecological crises.



Diocese of Oxford

September

We launch our new learning hub, with 60 people signing up for a course on mission and evangelism.

Hannah Mann



July

General Synod carries Oxford's motion on the climate emergency, and 21 new deacons ordained at Christ Church Cathedral.



Emma Thompson, Sally Welch, Steven Buckley

October

We appoint three new advocates for women's ministry, to champion female clergy, the Revd Preb Jane Haslam, the Revd Dr Sally Welch, and the Revd Canon Liz Jackson.

Hannah Mann



November

We launch two new community alliances as part of our partnership with Citizens UK, in Oxford and Reading.

Tony Kerry



December

Bishop's Council approves plan for improving our clergy houses, that will see more than 200 properties retrofitted over the next four years.

Rebekah Sharrock



January

We support a Hope for Humanity event at Oxford Town Hall to express love and fellowship with others during times of conflict.

Steven Buckley



February

Come and See begins for the fourth year. We remember Bishop Alan, who sadly died this month after serving his entire ordained life in the diocese.

Rowan Lake



March

Amplify, a new, diocesan-wide initiative aimed at transforming how we engage with the voices of young people, launches at Diocesan Synod.

Rowan Lake



April

Bishop Gavin gives the sermon at the annual Chrism Mass service held at Christ Church Cathedral, where tree saplings were handed out for the first time.

BISHOP'S COUNCIL

Bishop's Council is responsible for considering matters of policy, advising the diocesan bishop and determining how matters should be taken forward to the Diocesan Synod. It is the standing committee of the Diocesan Synod and the board of directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance. It is made up of lay and clerical members of parishes, elected by archdeaconry, plus ex-officio members.

Strategic

Our common vision, and its five areas of strategic focus, were the subject of the Bishop's Council away day. In recognition of all that has been achieved working with Citizen's UK, Bishop's Council renewed the partnership for a further three years. In December the delivery plan to spend £10 million towards our vicarages being carbon net zero was adopted and is now being implemented.

In February, Bishop's Council approved a revised approach for our strategy for children, young people and schools and the plans for a national church bid to support the urgent need to increase engagement with children and young people in our churches.

Following discussion at Diocesan Synod, Bishop's Council agreed the diocese's views on the governance of its cathedral, which are now being discussed with Christ Church. A new diocesan safeguarding strategy was supported, on the recommendation of the independently-chaired diocesan safeguarding panel. Bishop's Council has also monitored closely developments regarding Living in Love and Faith, particularly the implications for parishes.

Financial

A review of our total return methodology concluded last May which, with the introduction of a five-year forecast of all our finances, has given greater clarity to our financial reporting.

We conducted a limited review of parish share, responding to feedback from the 2022-23 review. A stipend increase of 6% from 1 April 2024 was agreed following significantly below-inflation increases recently. The cost of the clergy pension scheme is reducing from that date, with no reduction in benefits, enabling the stipend changes to take place within a 3% average increase in parish share.

Governance and operations

Bishop's Council agreed new governance structures for our resourcing hubs and to cover our new ordained assistant ministry training.

Departmental workplans were agreed and reports from each archdeaconry were received.

The elected representation of the new Diocesan Synod was approved, as were a steady stream of appointments to diocesan committees.

A three-yearly governance review was also commissioned.

Senior staff changes

We said goodbye during the year to two long-standing senior staff. Poli Shajko left in August and was replaced as Director of People by Charnelle Stylianides. David Mason stepped down as director last June before leaving in March, and was succeeded by Sophie Orme as Director of Property. Bishop's Council had an opportunity to offer the considerable thanks of the diocese to Poli and David for their excellent service and then to welcome and hear from Sophie and Charnelle.



Emma Thompson

MISSION AND MINISTRY

Our world is changing in unprecedented ways; during these challenging times, we strive to fulfil our common vision to become a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world. The Department of Mission and Ministry supports the diocese at every level, and particularly the local church, in response to that vision.

Environmental action

We celebrated our 23rd awarded Silver Eco Church in 2023, as momentum among parishes for creation care continues to build. Well over one quarter of all churches are now taking part in Eco Church, with 30 new churches registering since May and 22 churches progressing to bronze and silver awards. Over 50 churches have had energy audits or heating surgeries to support net zero carbon planning.

In June, we ran three care for creation events covering all archdeaconries, and attended by over 150 people. We heard inspiring stories of local action and equipped parishes in all settings to progress through Eco Church by linking them up with one another and sharing resources.

Churches have reduced CO₂ emissions by 11% since 2019

We continue to work in partnership with the local Wildlife Trust, offering training for volunteers on managing churchyards and conducting site surveys. Alongside the Church Buildings Team, we developed guidance to support churches in turning their energy audit into a deliverable action plan. The audit programme continues to be valuable for churches, alongside a new offer of funded heating surgeries.

"We just wanted to say a huge thank you to you and the diocese for organising this [heating surgery]... It was phenomenally helpful and exactly at the right time for us... It has definitely impacted how we are going to take forward our heating project."

Emmanuel Church, Bicester

We secured £155,000 of national funding in February to support our preparations for achieving net zero carbon among our churches, and this project will be delivered across 2024-2025.

Social justice



Holy Trinity Church in Charlton hosts between 30 and 80 children, families and older people every week, who receive a free three-course hot meal prepared by a professional chef. Around Table Wantage began in response to the cost-of-living crisis, and the church also acts as a warm space for those in the community.

Around Table Wantage

We launched two new Citizens Alliances last autumn, in Oxford and Reading. Both alliances have identified key issues to tackle, including housing justice in Oxford and migration welcome in Reading. New funding of £15,000 per annum has been granted to continue our strategic partnership with Citizens UK over the next three years.

38 parishes signed up to be Warm Spaces last winter

Clergy met with Theresa May MP to share concerns about the Illegal Migration Bill, and a Bed for the Night scheme in Reading widened support to refugees experiencing homelessness.

We welcomed a further 24 Ukrainians to homes in 2024. Forty-four Ukrainian groups and families moved out of their host's home into independent accommodation, to other countries, or back to Ukraine.

We continued to provide cost-of-living resources, with 2,000 cost of living prayer postcards sent to parishes.

"We had the [cost of living prayer] cards at church this morning – and they've all gone! People really appreciated them and have taken them home to pray with. Have you got more?"



Children, young people and families

In March 2024, Diocesan Synod unanimously endorsed a renewed vision for our mission and ministry with children, young people and families across our churches and schools. Our hope is to see every benefice growing and deepening this ministry by 2030.

We will be building on Disciples Together, our foundational diocesan agreed framework for ministering with and among children, young people and families (CYPF). Across the parish and deaneries, we aim to see a growing number of children and young people deeply rooted in Christ and living out their faith in the world for the whole of their lives. This means flourishing, sustainable provision for young people and young adults; strong connections between churches and schools in every place; and growing the numbers of trained volunteers, CYPF ministers and school chaplains who will be essential.

200 parishes engaged and advised

At the same time as working on this renewed vision, our Discipleship Enablers have continued to offer vital support and advice to parishes and CYPF ministers particularly in relation to associated Development Fund applications as together we seek to increase engagement with children and young people.

We held induction days for seven newly-appointed CYPF ministers, and our retreat programme for employed ministers and volunteers has provided a much-needed space for ministers to recharge, with attendees valuing the 'permission to reset again'.

Engagement with the Space Makers contemplative toolkit remains positive. Since its launch last May:

- Over 300 Space Makers for Families packs have been delivered.
- 100 individuals have been trained in using the toolkit in parishes, schools, families or through events run by our education team.
- Contemplative practices based on Space Makers have formed an integral part of Come and See.

We said farewell to Ian Macdonald after 20 years' faithfully serving and supporting youth ministry in the diocese.

An ongoing piece of work into 2024 is a significant application to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board, which, if successful, will enable intensive resource for growth across parts of the diocese.

In collaboration with Wycombe Deanery, we have launched a strategic initiative to support engagement with youth and children's ministry. This aims to reach out to every school in the deanery, enhance our engagement in youth and children's ministry, and cultivate a community through the exchange of skills and stories.



Vocations and formation for ministry

Our Vocations team is supported by a network of volunteers across the diocese. Together, they supported 80 candidates, exploring what God is calling them to and what type of ministry is right for their unique gifts. Fifteen were put forward for national selection for ordained ministry.

Four vocations events gave people from all parts of the Church in the diocese the opportunity to explore lay and ordained ministry. These included events with a specific focus on reaching underrepresented groups – UKME, disabled and neurodiverse people. We also held monthly vocations drop-ins online and in person.

In 2023 we ordained 21 deacons and 29 priests

Attention is now focussed on implementing our new Vocations strategy, seeking to develop the vocation of the whole people of God and raise the number of vocations to lay and ordained ministries to pre-Covid levels.

The Learning Hub

The Learning Hub launched in September 2023. It is a structured learning environment aimed at growing discipleship and enabling lay ministry to flourish across the diocese. At its heart is a vision to make good discipleship, theology and lay ministry training available and accessible for all.

There are three kinds of course: Bite-sized, Going Deeper, and Study Groups. During 2023, we launched one Bite-sized course on the Beatitudes, with 109 registered users, and one Going Deeper course, the Story of Scripture, with 197 registered users.

We have also run two Study Group courses – Mission and Evangelism and Opening the Bible, which together attracted over 100 participants.

“The website was so easy to navigate and use. The organisation so brilliant. The Bishop’s 20-minute talks were stimulating. The tutorials well facilitated. Highlight was the day at Church House and face-to-face.”

Participant in Mission and Evangelism course

There is another course in each category planned before September. Further courses will be developed and put online over the coming years.



Ministry training

During 2023, the Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) team re-formed with a new part-time CMD Advisor, the Revd Gill Lovell. The team offered free coaching in an international 'coachathon' to raise awareness of coaching opportunities for clergy in the diocese. It also began delivery of courses provided by the Clergy Support Trust in the area of mental health, wellbeing and relationship building.

We also:

- Trained seven people for Licensed Lay Ministry on the current pathway, due to be phased out in 2024, while six people entered training on the Learning Hub.
- Saw a further 12 begin training for ordained ministry on a new course run in partnership with the Learning Hub and Ripon College, Cuddesdon.
- Were responsible for the training of 126 curates across 98 benefices over the course of the year.

'I remain immensely grateful for the quality of the courses you organised.'

Participant in Licensed Lay Ministry training

New training days for curates were developed, including community organising, pastoral liturgy, world mission and self-supporting minister transitions. Nineteen curates were licensed to first posts of responsibility.

Generous giving

Generous Giving support helps churches to nurture a culture of giving and generosity. The practical support on offer ranges from advice on fundraising asks to administering contactless devices and the Parish Giving Scheme.

Well over 100 churches were supported in 2023, most often with contactless technology, followed by regular giving, and fundraising, demonstrating that churches are taking steps to ensure their ministry and mission is sustainable into the future.

The interest in regular giving led to a boost in the number of parishes signing up to the Parish Giving Scheme later in the year, bringing the total income through the scheme in 2023 to more than £8.33m.

A fundraising training event in the spring was well attended by representatives from 26 different churches. We piloted a series of small-group sessions on generosity and faith, which we hope to make available more widely in 2024. We welcomed the first three churches onto the new contactless Loan-to-Buy scheme in December.

Madeleine Hayden



Steven Buckley



Growing new congregations

Our vision to support parishes to nurture new disciples, through the growth of new congregations, has been affirmed in 2023 through the integration of the Parish Development Advisors into the New Congregations team, the development of learning communities, and increasing engagement with a network of pioneers.

In the latest Articles of Enquiry, 166 parishes told us that between them they have 101 new mission initiatives and 129 potential new worshipping communities. We continue to support 11 deanery learning communities, which have welcomed 95 teams – and a further three learning communities are emerging in 2024. These are nurturing both the desire for church growth through new congregations, and the existing missional initiatives which are looking to take the next step.

“It was a great morning! Time out of a busy week, but I’m glad I took it for inspiration and a discovery that it’s quite simple to think about green shoots in and around one’s congregation and setting, however widely you want to do that... So, thank you Greenhouse. AMEN!”

Jeremy, participant at Deanery Learning Community

Since our focus area began, 38 Development Fund grants have been awarded to projects that have new congregations at their centre. Our Resource Hubs

continue to seek opportunities for church plants and revitalisations, and many are re-casting their vision for growth in a post-pandemic context.

We are in touch with a network of over 50 lay and ordained pioneers. In November, Bishop Steven hosted a lunch for over 25 pioneer ministers who were able to listen to one another and share experiences. Together with our colleagues in formation, discipleship and vocations, we are developing a robust pathway of training and recognition to those called to minister missionally in this area.



In 2019, St Mary's Church in Cholsey began a Forest Church initiative. With outdoor worship, craft and play, this new congregation has welcomed 15 adults and 25 children who are not regular attendees at church on Sunday.

Susie Pocock

DT(O)L

Diocesan Trustees (Oxford) Ltd is the diocesan authority that acts as custodian trustee to hold property on behalf of PCCs and other ecclesiastical charities. The management of all trusts lies with parish trustees.

In 2023, DT(O)L assisted parish-managing trustees with their plans for mission, including handling 45 property transactions for the sale of property and the grant of leases providing capital or income to support church mission and ministry. In addition, they gave support to parish-managing trustees with new tenancies, renewals and leases.

DT(O)L is the sole trustee of the Oxford Diocesan Church Schools Uniform Statutory Trust (CSUST). The trust monies arise from the sale proceeds or rent of closed schools and schoolhouses in the diocese.

In 2023, grants totalling £462k were given to promote the work of ODBE, enabling advice and support for school and academy personnel who contribute to outreach and mission.

During 2023, DT(O)L resolved to pass the trusteeship of those funds to our Diocesan Board of Education with the residual business then becoming exercised by Bishop's Council members. This is taking effect in 2024.

FINANCE

We spent £30.7m in 2023. This was funded by donations from the Church community and income from other sources. We're committed to making sure our income is used efficiently, effectively, and responsibly, so that we make every pound count.

We remain extremely grateful for the work of our parishes in achieving their Parish Share allocations, of which we received 94.5% of the amount requested. Inflation remained higher than Bank of England targets in 2023, but we continued to budget for no aggregate increase in Share whilst awarding a 4% increase in stipends.

The 2023 result has seen a surplus predominantly due to the vacancy rate on clergy posts being higher than budgeted. This had the double impact on results of reducing stipendiary costs, whilst increasing rental income on vicarages.

The 2023 surplus (and forecasted 2024 result) was reviewed by Bishop's Council, and the following allocation of those surpluses was agreed:

- Stipend and salary increases to 6% (previously budgeted at 5%) in April 2024. This does enable an element of real growth in stipend levels following the recent higher inflationary environment and draws on a reduced clergy pension contribution.
- £250k will be transferred into a designated fund and

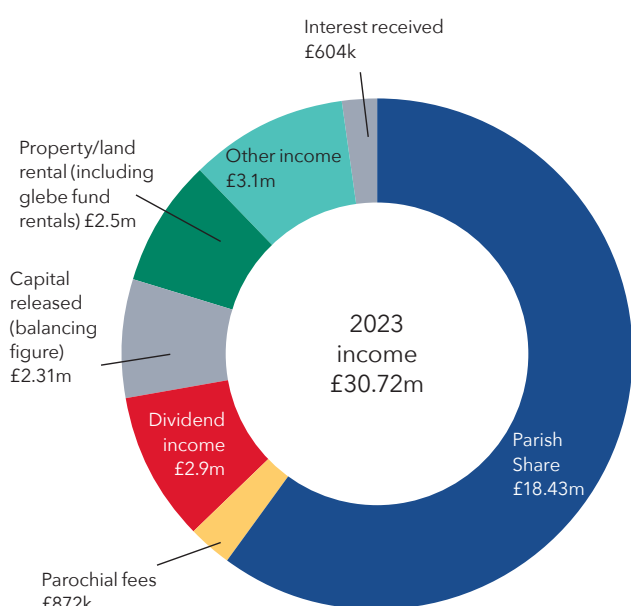
will provide a credit to Share allocations where clergy have been absent for a period of more than six months (or from day one in the case of maternity leave).

- A one-off deficit-related payment into the closed staff pension scheme.
- £200k a year, for at least two years, will be added to the Development Fund to be used specifically to support the diocesan children and young people strategy.
- A reduction in 2024 and 2025 in the transitional 'floor' used in the Share system from 1% to 0% to support those deaneries whose allocations are higher than that calculated in the model.

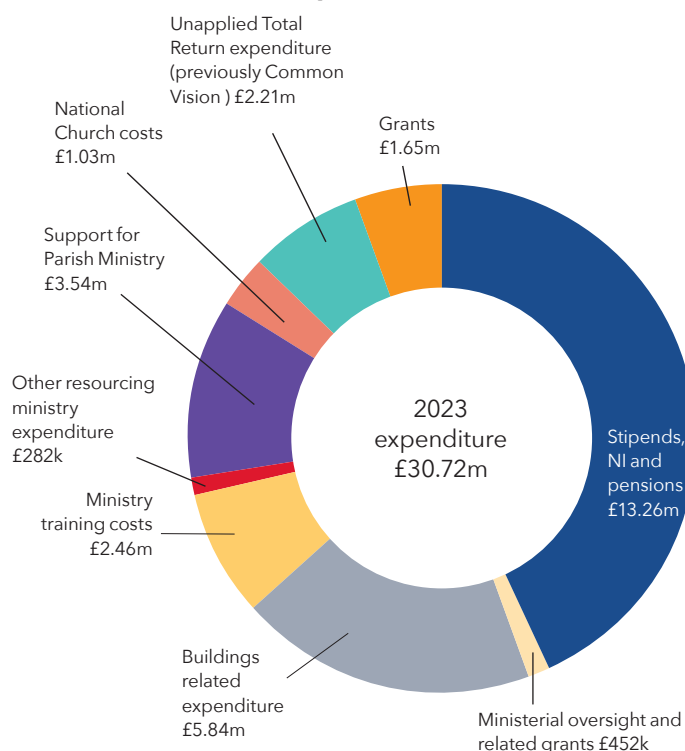
2023 highlights also included:

- A new five-year projection model for all funds within Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance.
- A review of the Total Return investment mechanism, to ensure that the Unapplied Total Return Fund (previously named the Common Vision Fund) could continue to meet its projected obligations.

Income



Expenditure



Apportioned into the above are the following support costs: Secretariat (£234k), Finance (£274k), Human Resources (£318k), Governance (£253k), IT (£245k), Church House (269k). Charts based on 2023 Management Accounts.

COMMUNICATIONS

The department supports all that we say and do. The work ranges from handling media enquiries to producing Pathways, our website, data analysis and finding new ways to share the good news. The team is on hand with help and advice for parishes every day of the week.

Key moments

The launch of the new Learning Hub in September involved the creation of 30 pieces of technical content. Internal and external training for the use of the hub has been completed, and the team is now putting in place the capacity and processes to support the addition of future courses.

Come and See preparation meant recording videos, preparing promotional posters, and building web pages and emails for participants ready for launch in February. We promoted and took part in an information session encouraging sign-ups to this year's course. An accompanying booklet 'Pilgrim Journeys: The Way of Love' has been published and is available to buy on our online shop.

We provided photography and communications support for key diocesan events, including the Oxford Interfaith Vigil, Diocesan Safeguarding Sunday service, national Disability Conference and Licensed Lay Ministry service.



SCAN ME

We supported colleagues in producing two short films; one about what it's like to work for the diocese, and another encouraging people to consider whether they are being called to ordained ministry.

Print



We initiated a new benefice distribution model for Pathways, enabling churches to order copies more precisely. Two special editions of the magazine are planned for 2024, the first of which marked the 30th anniversary of the ordination of women.

The latest edition of the *Oxford Journal for Intercultural Mission* was published in February, taking a closer look at Black History Month and what more we can do to focus on racial issues throughout the year.

"I was delighted to pick up *Pathways* from St Matthew's church yesterday. Congrats to all concerned. It's streets ahead of previous diocesan newsletters."

Pat Alexander, St Matthew's Church, Oxford

Media activity

Bishop Steven's involvement in discussions around Artificial Intelligence has generated increasing interest from media outlets, including BBC Radio 4's *Beyond Belief* programme in May. Our bishops featured on local radio stations and news outlets with their Christmas and New Year messages, and our interfaith work during this year of conflict has received positive coverage in local press.

As ever, the department was on hand for parishes looking to share their stories across and beyond the diocese. Local media interest remains high, particularly in the work our churches are doing to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. We secured radio interviews with churches sharing their experience of delivering warm spaces, welcoming refugees, and running food projects and community hubs.

Data analysis

Timely data analysis from October and Christmas attendance figures has significantly enhanced the ability of the diocese, deaneries and parishes to recognise emerging missional trends and plan ahead on an informed basis. We are now working on data from the 2021 census, and by linking data from different sources, we can provide richer datasets while also reducing the burden of collection on parishes.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SAFEGUARDING

HR enables our common vision through agile organisational structures and creative deployment of staff, promoting a culture of fairness, accountability and mutual respect.

The team leads on equality, diversity and inclusion and supports Development Fund bids. HR manages payroll for clergy and staff and oversees the Ministerial Development Review scheme, Authorised Listener programme and conflict-transformation resources. In 2023, the team:

- Recruited for 22 staff and five volunteer roles in response to changing workforce needs, some generated by our common vision workstreams.
- Responded to 72 enquiries from parishes, staff and schools.
- Supported 36 employee and 42 clergy wellbeing matters, advised on 61 employee contractual matters, including 10 flexible working arrangements, and processed 55 clergy HR enquiries.
- Onboarded 20 volunteers, and supported eight volunteer Authorised Listeners.

Our team have been raising awareness of the Access to Work funding that is available, and supporting clergy and employees to apply. This includes funding for specialist equipment, assistive technology, support workers, assistance with transport and travel costs if they have a physical or mental health condition, physical disability or learning disability.

In line with commitments to staff wellbeing and environmental action, we have partnered with two external suppliers to offer a Cycle to Work scheme and an electric vehicle leasing scheme.

ED NIX



An additional six electric vehicle charging stations were installed at Church House by local companies.

Safeguarding is part of the mission of the church; children, young people and vulnerable adults must be able to worship and grow in Christ safely.



Steven Buckley

The team lead on preventative and reactive safeguarding work, and on average in 2023 we provided guidance for 50 safeguarding enquiries per month and received a monthly average of 22 safeguarding referrals, some of which resulted in live cases requiring involvement of statutory authorities.

We launched a diocesan safeguarding strategy to further develop our vision to be at the forefront of excellent safeguarding practice. The working group for the 432 Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs) has gone from strength to strength, and more than 100 PSOs attended our monthly area drop-in sessions.

On Safeguarding Sunday in November, we recognised the outstanding work of our safeguarding staff and volunteers at a thanksgiving service in the diocesan cathedral.

We reviewed all safeguarding operations and are building a strong team with a focus on continuous improvement and embedding good practice. Our safeguarding practice is quality assured by an independently chaired diocesan safeguarding panel sub-group and the national church, as part of a pilot project responding to the IICSA 1 and 8 recommendations.

Diversity and inclusion

We celebrate the inclusion, contribution and ministry of disabled people, those from UKME backgrounds and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Our Resolved to Serve exhibition was hosted at University Church, Oxford, to mark Black History Month in October.

“Thank you so much for letting us borrow it, it was really amazing and prompted so many helpful conversations! ...since having the exhibition in situ, we now have two folk who have agreed to serve as regular subdeacons at the altar. It is small but significant beginnings...”

Hannah Cartwright

In 2023 we:

- Gathered with over 100 church leaders to worship and learn together for the first ever Intercultural Mission Conference in the Church of England.

- Welcomed Archbishop Howard Gregory of the West Indies as part of celebrations to mark the 75 year anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush to the UK.
- Increased female and UKME representation in diocesan senior leadership roles.
- Partnered with the National Minority Ethnic Vocations Advisers to deliver racial justice awareness days to staff and curates at regional Theological Education Institutes.
- Marked Racial Equality Week with over 200 Berkshire school children.
- Organised and led the first national conference for 35 diocesan disability advisers and nominated delegates, who met together for worship, teaching and mutual resourcing over a three-day period.
- Provided vital pastoral support through our LGBTQIA+ chaplains to people across the diocese.

COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

2023 has been a momentous year, as we came together in July to celebrate 125 years of service to the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. We were privileged to have Bishop Steven preach and lead us in a service of thanksgiving.

The Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf (ODCD) works with d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in the diocese to meet their spiritual, social and general needs, and to give them a voice and full participation in church and society.

Our Lead Chaplain, the Revd Hannah Lewis, continues to grow the work among the deaf and hard of hearing through leading worship, pastoral care, and support at weddings and funerals. Opportunities to lead worship at Christ Church Cathedral have helped raised awareness of ODCD's work among the hearing community, and Hannah has been taking regular assemblies at Mary Hare School for the Deaf, meeting 250 d/Deaf children and young people, as well as the staff.

We provided regular worship in British Sign Language (BSL) on Zoom and onsite in Reading, Slough, Gerrards

Cross, Newbury, Christ Church Cathedral, and Milton Keynes, serving approximately 75 d/Deaf BSL users. In December, we trialled a BSL carol service for the d/Deaf community in Aylesbury.

“I’ve never been able to join in Christmas carols like that before, because normally it’s so hard to sign and follow the interpreter, but the way you did it, made it easy to join in.”

Attendee at the BSL carol service

Deaf awareness training has been delivered across the diocese, and the chapel at Reading Deaf Centre has been redecorated to become the heart for the whole of our diocesan d/Deaf community.

PROPERTY

Our Property team oversees the repair and maintenance of more than 470 vicarages and other properties, to provide well-maintained, future-proofed and energy efficient houses for clergy and tenants. With over 4,000 acres of land, we also identify opportunities to develop this land in a way that provides a sustainable income for the diocese, while also benefitting local communities.

Together with rental costs, housing allowances, council tax, water rates, buildings insurance and other bills, gross costs to care for our vicarages remain around £4m each year. This also includes measures to support decarbonisation, including the replacement of windows and doors, the installation of secondary glazing, and solar panels and air source heat pumps where appropriate.

In 2023 we delivered:

- Seven house sales and four replacements.
- Nine kitchen refurbishments.
- 15 bathrooms replacements.
- 45 clergy moves.

Staffing and administration costs for this work account for under 10% of expenditure. The team generated fee income of £100k in 2023, from school surveys and projects.

We took great strides forward to implement our net zero carbon by 2035 programme. Bishop's Council approved the plan to improve all houses to a minimum

energy efficiency standard of EPC C by 2028. This requires works and improvements to half the housing stock, retrofitting 50 properties a year and prioritising, where possible, the removal of oil-fired boilers.

By March 2024, 15 properties had already achieved EPC C, and occupants had moved in to the first retrofit trial property in Bucklebury. Sophie Orme, the new Director of Property, joined the team in August to oversee this work.



Rowan Lake

BOARD OF PATRONAGE

The Oxford Diocese Board of Patronage (ODBP) met twice in 2023 to discuss and progress vacancies for which they hold the patronage. Members of the board were involved in 19 vacancy processes, seeing the successful appointment of ten incumbents/clergy, with nine other vacancies still live at the end of the year.

The Board is constituted under the provisions of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986. It has provision for five lay and three clerical members, each elected for six years. The present Board took office in January 2019. In 2023, the board saw the retirement of Brian Griffiths as secretary, and welcomed Nigel Edward-Few in that role.

DEVELOPMENT FUND

In 2023, the Development Fund made its 200th award to local church and community projects for a range of missionally creative activities, bringing the total funding distributed to almost £4m. Forty-six awards totalling £837,000 were made in 2023 for projects benefitting churches and their communities across the Thames Valley region.

Summer activities for youth

St John's Church, Crowthorne, with Churches Together in Crowthorne, organised summer activities for young people across four Fridays during the summer holidays. Six hundred children enjoyed the physical activities, crafts and prayer tent. The local food bank was available to provide information to parents and carers.

"Those who came along felt comfortable talking to volunteers about the church and Jesus. As a result, we have noticed more families in church, as by being with people they have realised that we are not different or unapproachable but friendly and welcoming as they are willing to explore their faith with us."

Leigh Welham

Churches Together in Crowthorne



Space for All

After a year of major interior restoration and reordering, All Saints Wokingham has reopened its doors. The space will be used for regular worship and community events and as an arts and music venue. In 2023, the Development Fund agreed to support further work to develop the church's "space for all" into an active community hub through a grant for a Community and Volunteer Empowerment Officer.

Support for families

Kidlington with Hampton Poyle has started two facilitated support groups for parents and carers of secondary-school aged children with mental ill health, neurodiversity, or special educational needs, as well as parents of adult children who have similar conditions.

"Our groups will provide a safe space to support the parents. People are going to come here to talk about their families' complex needs which is why we needed a professional facilitator to run the groups. The Development Fund grant will pay for those facilitators for the next two years."

The Revd Felicity Scroggie

Interactive Christmas story

Visitors to St Mary and St Berin's Church, Berinsfield, enjoyed a 'live-action' telling of the Christmas story. Development Fund support helped to provide an interactive experience for 80 local children and 50 adults. It included a mobile farm visit to bring the nativity stable alive with real animals, interactive storytelling stations, dressing up, a photo booth and refreshments.



St Luke's, Reading, used a Development Fund grant to buy a bench that sits at the heart of their rewilding garden.

Jane Kenyon

SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat handles pastoral reorganisation and the administrative affairs of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance, ensuring good governance across all diocesan boards and councils. It oversees data protection and is responsible of the day-to-day management of the Development Fund. The Secretariat co-ordinates bidding for grants, and during 2023, £400k was secured to support additional capacity in our Church Buildings team, prepare churches for net zero carbon, and extend our racial justice work. We are particularly grateful for the support from the Benefact Trust and the Church Commissioners.

Church buildings

The Church Buildings team has had an exceptionally busy year as we continue to advise parishes on the care, repair and development of their church buildings, supporting parishes to fulfil their local vision of loving and serving their communities.

The DAC has welcomed new members and advisers, and introduced processes so advice can be offered to churches more quickly on a range of issues. We successfully secured £177k funding over three years to support minor repairs to churches, and grow the team so we can better support parishes.

While the breadth of work remains extensive, there has been a particular focus this year on navigating and implementing the new faculty jurisdiction rules relating to net zero carbon. We have:

- Participated in a joint event with the Environment Team to help parishes progress energy audit recommendations.
- Commissioned trials of new net zero carbon heating technologies.
- Published new guidance on topics such as different decarbonised heating technologies and draught-proofing.

“I am writing on behalf of Peasemore St Barnabas PCC to express our thanks to all the faculty staff who have supported us in our church community space project... We are using the new facilities regularly to welcome the community back into our church through events such as concerts, lunches and coffee mornings – none of which were possible without the new open space, kitchen and toilet.”

Neil Sanderson



Neil Sanderson

10% of all applications were for major alteration or reordering

1500+ applications and enquiries

73 site visits in 2023

Pastoral support

Pastoral support and reorganisation has been brought into the Church Buildings team this year. We have:

- Supported over 100 parishes through pastoral reorganisations solutions, individually tailored to improve their local mission and ministry.
- Held 11 meetings of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and its five subcommittees, which considered deanery-led proposals for changes to pastoral arrangements and clergy provision.
- Considered ten proposals for new Pastoral Schemes and (Bishop's Pastoral) Orders, two for new Bishop Mission Orders (BMOs) and one variation of an existing BMO.
- Guided work to translate legal structures and processes to better reflect parish-level needs, and to explore wider options to enable church buildings to remain open and sustainable through BMOs, Joint Councils and Church Futures.

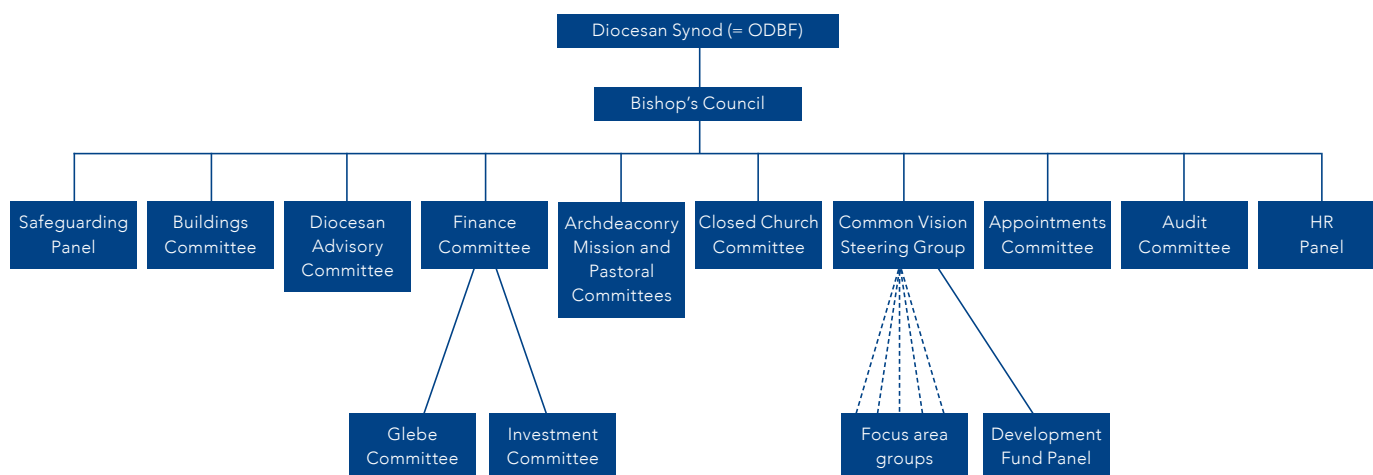
GOVERNANCE

There are a wide range of boards, councils and committees that promote and oversee aspects of activity in the life of the diocese. Each committee has specific responsibility from Diocesan Synod or Bishop's Council to discharge duties on their behalf.

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Diocesan Trustees (Oxford) Ltd are separate legal entities with an accountability to Diocesan Synod. Partnership in World Mission and the Interfaith Committee have an accountability to Diocesan Synod

but also has engagement with both Bishop's Council and the Bishop's senior staff.

During 2024, we will undertake a review of our committee activities to ensure they provide an appropriate and effective level of governance in supporting the mission of the diocese.



Other committees reporting to Bishop's Council:

- UKME Oversight Group
- Disability Oversight Group
- Resourcing Hub Board
- Local Ministry Pathway
- Rural Advisory Group

AREA OFFICES

Buckingham

In memory of the Rt Revd Dr Alan Wilson, Bishop of Buckingham

We sadly marked the passing of Bishop Alan Wilson, who died unexpectedly in February. Alan served as Bishop of Buckingham for over 20 years. His entire ordained ministry was within the Diocese of Oxford as a curate in Eynsham, Vicar in Caversham and Sandhurst, Area Dean of Sonning and then Bishop of Buckingham.

“Alan was a dear friend and colleague to many across the Diocese... He has offered remarkable leadership to our work in education and church schools over more than a decade... I will miss him as a friend and colleague. The Church has lost a wise, pastoral and prophetic bishop.”

Bishop Steven

- Buckinghamshire continues to be at the centre of growth and development, with near completion of a new East West Rail line, the ongoing disruption caused by HS2, and rapid house building in Aylesbury, Buckingham and Milton Keynes. The Buckingham area has sought to offer a significant missional response to this developing context.
- A decision was made to seek external support for investment in mission and ministry in Milton Keynes,



Steven Buckley

which was granted city status in 2022. Exciting plans are underway to develop a vision for the way in which we serve these parishes and communities.

- Deaneries and Resource Hubs in Aylesbury, Wycombe and Slough have focussed support and investment in some of our poorest estates, where we are seeing encouraging church growth, and congregations that are ‘growing younger’.
- Fourteen churches have benefited from Development Fund support to complete facilities projects, as part of their mission and outreach work. Our village churches have continued to demonstrate their resilience as statistics show post-pandemic recovery has been strongest among our small rural parishes.

Dorchester

- Whilst finding resources (not least volunteers) has been challenging, 2023 has seen our churches recover further from Covid, as they work hard to regain momentum. Christmas was an inspiring time for many, with strong numbers and lots of new faces, and a number have encouragingly reported new worshippers.
- Our churches continue to be particularly busy with efforts to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis and to welcome migrants to their communities. Food banks are in demand, and those churches which are supporting debt-relief projects find their expertise is needed more than ever.
- Clergy are doing a brilliant job leading their churches into new times. Many of our churches are still looking at imaginative mission, be that through festivals, holding services outdoors or through the diocesan Greenhouse initiative.



Steven Buckley

Oxford

- Archdeacon Jonathan returned to his primary role following almost a year as interim subdean, and Peter Groves continues part time as Associate Archdeacon.
- New appointments have been made at St Clements and Iffley following recent retirements. This has brought opportunities for creative partnerships in the Cowley Deanery, while three new Bishop's Mission Orders around the Archdeaconry represent exciting missional initiatives in collaboration with parishes and deaneries.
- Articles of Enquiry data revealed that 70% of Oxford churches are offering weekly provision for children and youth ministry, and this area of ministry will receive increasing emphasis.
- Oxford collaborated with Dorchester Archdeaconry in churchwarden training that focussed on wellbeing in parish ministry, conflict management and the vacancy process, with around 50 churchwardens attending the training morning.



Claire Barratt

Berkshire

- There has been growing engagement with newly-arrived people from Hong Kong, with over 1,000 new Cantonese-speaking worshippers joining churches in Reading. There is now an emerging strategic plan to welcome Hong Kongers into our churches and better resource worship in Cantonese.
- Many churches across Berkshire are supporting work with some of the most vulnerable people in our communities: including the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, and those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.
- We celebrated the completion of the diocese's first net zero vicarage in Bucklebury and a new incumbent has moved in.
- We are encouraged by the excellent attendance at church services over the Christmas period, especially in rural areas.
- A Reading-wide youth event was run by the local churches in November which saw 188 young people gather to worship and hear more about how we respond to questions about faith, with around 30 young people coming forward to commit their life to Jesus.



Reading Youth Ministry Team



EDUCATION

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education serves 285 Church schools across the diocese and works with 21 Multi-Academy Trusts with church school academy members. These schools continue to be some of the best in the country, with 95% judged 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Since September 2023, ODBE has been a regional delivery partner for the range of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) offered by the Church of England's Education Office. These are a suite of qualifications available free of charge to teachers and leaders across the Diocese of Oxford. Interest and initial take up has been strong and it is reassuring that the next generation of school leaders are being trained and developed to take up future roles in our Church of England schools.

ODBE is working in partnership with the Ashmolean Museum and Christ Church Cathedral to deliver 'To Be A Pilgrim,' an exciting new project made possible through generous grant funding from the Bayne Benefaction.

We offer Year 6 pupils a day's visit to the museum and cathedral to explore the historical and spiritual aspects of pilgrimage.

Since 2020, ODBE schools have benefitted from more than £1.5m in measures to support energy efficiency and net zero carbon. Over the past year, many schools have updated their lighting to LEDs, using the Department for Education energy improvement grant while others have purchased solar PV panels, with a resulting 13.7% decrease in electricity emissions since 2019. ODBE has used capital condition monies to support the switch to heat pumps where this has been the best identified solution. A prioritised plan for the decarbonisation of heating of all schools is in place and will be delivered as funding is released.

School Chaplaincy continues to grow in state schools, both primary and secondary, church and community schools. At the last count 47 new school and Further Education (FE) chaplaincy roles, of all different shapes and sizes, have come on board in the last five years. The openness of FE colleges to receive chaplaincy has been particularly notable.

The Space Makers in Schools programme also continues to expand with 148 schools having received training, and scores of parishes and clergy also becoming involved in delivering these contemplative prayer practices. The resource is also being shared with five other dioceses and it has even reached Ukraine, Myanmar, South Africa and Australia.

Our schools achieved 100% success rate in SIAMS since inspections restarted after the pandemic.



**SPACE
MAKERS**

the contemplative toolkit for schools

BEYOND THE DIOCESE

We firmly believe we are one part of the body of Christ. We seek to contribute to, and support, the whole life of the Church of England by sharing our resources and expertise for the benefit of all.

Supporting other dioceses

In July 2023, a further commitment of financial support to the least resourced dioceses for the period 2025-29 was agreed by Diocesan Synod, following a similar, successful initiative in 2020. The allocation of £1.5 million is made on a 'first fruits' basis, committing the amount for the full five-year period.

Previous support of this kind has been used by other dioceses to develop work on racial justice, to fund a pioneer minister in deprived benefices, and to set up new mission projects in communities.

"In this diocese, the 'Oxford grant' continues to bear glorious fruit, in the ministry of a highly able young woman priest called Lucy, who leads a BMO in one of the most deprived communities in Sheffield, where the congregation is now growing and where the church community is having an increasingly significant impact locally."

Bishop of Sheffield

"We thought long and hard about how best to use the money... We landed on the issue of racial justice and, in particular, how we might properly respond to the From Lament to Action report... We therefore committed the money to fund the costs of a Racial Justice Officer for the diocese and cathedral for five years... The support from the Diocese of Oxford, supplemented by support from the national church, will be transformational."

Mike Eastwood, Diocesan Secretary,
Diocese of Liverpool

National advocacy

We have led the way in responding to the climate emergency, and took a long-awaited motion to General Synod in July. This motion challenged all parts of the Church of England to act with the urgency and speed required in the face of the huge challenge before us, by scaling up investment in renewable energy and climate solutions, lobbying government to review planning laws, and praying, acting and advocating for creation care at every level.

The motion, led by the Bishop of Reading, was resoundingly passed and generated lively and encouraging debate as to the challenges, solutions and opportunities that lie ahead.



Geoff Crawford

Bishop Steven introduced a motion to February's General Synod on the future of work, which publicly affirmed the place of work as a key component in 'human flourishing' in an era when artificial intelligence is driving a 'new fast moving industrial revolution'.

"We were placed in a garden and charged with a God-given task from the very beginning. Work is related intimately to human dignity and purpose. The theological value of work faces new and powerful challenges and needs to be articulated afresh in the public square."

Bishop of Oxford

WORLD MISSION

At a time of uncertainty and change, we are working with world church partners to build relationships across nations and cultures, and to discern together how we can serve Christ through our common commitment to the five marks of mission.

This year, our link with Nandyal in India has been strengthened through two exchange visits; first by the Bishop of Dorchester and a small team in May, and by a visit from an ODBE team to a Nandyal church school in October. Our partnership has always had a strong emphasis on education, and this time the focus for the schools was on sharing information and ideas related to environmental issues. The school representing ODBE is now disseminating their learning across local church school networks in the diocese, and preparing for a return visit from their Nandyal counterparts in June.



James Dwyer

The environment also featured as one of three themes during a joint summit meeting with the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman. This took place both in person in Kimberley, and online via four virtual hubs in Thame, Upington, Kuruman and Church House Oxford. Over 100 participants undertook Bible study, worship and reflected together on three mutually identified mission areas across four days. These areas were the role of young people in the church, the environment and climate justice, and how the church can respond to gender-based violence and gender injustice.

“It was an incredibly insightful and thought-provoking event, and was grateful for the efforts to gather such an impactful audience.”

Vernon Mfusi, Kimberley and Kuruman committee member



Alistair Andrews

We also enjoyed visitors from the parishes of Mönsterås / Fliseryd in Sweden, who came to their link in the Akeman Benefice, in Bicester and Islip deanery – while a group of clergy from our diocese attended a 'Getting to know the Swedish Church' course in Växjö through the Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) programme. Four areas for future collaboration have emerged between our two dioceses: a cathedral link, parish development, programmes for confirmed young people, and the environment.

We seek to incorporate world church perspectives in our training programme and to share our training resources with partners. In June we held an online Mission and the World Church curates' training day incorporating link and agency partners.



Rowan Lake

INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Interfaith work has continued to develop with key events and relationship building among local faith communities, focusing on themes of peace and creation care. There have been two new Area Interfaith Advisors recently appointed in the Dorchester and Buckingham areas, and during Archdeacon Jonathan's secondment to the cathedral, the Revds Dr Paul Smith and Phil Ritchie have co-chaired the Diocesan Committee for Interfaith Relations.

Promoting peace and togetherness



In the aftermath of the tragic events in Israel and Gaza since October 2023, several events have taken place, including a vigil for peace in central Oxford in early November and a gathering of civic, community and faith leaders at Oxford Town Hall in January. Hope for Humanity offered an opportunity for reflection on peace and solidarity for those who are currently living in conflict here and overseas.

"I was there. It was beautiful... I spoke with several people from other faiths than my own. We shared peace... and I understood a little more of their journey."

Participant at the November vigil for peace

Interfaith Eco Conference "Reconnecting with the Planet"

A second diocesan interfaith eco conference was held at Slough and Eton College in November, offering the opportunity for input from pupils of several schools in



Rebekah Sharrock

the Slough area. The focus was on the effects of climate change and the importance of care for creation from different faith perspectives.

There were visual displays of climate change in the form of artistic triptychs from school pupils; a presentation on the links with schools in the church of South India; and a short session of scriptural reasoning introduced by the Revd Canon Dr Charlotte Bannister-Parker. Speakers from Growing Better Lives introduced a lively session on mental health and the climate emergency.

Presence and Engagement

The 2021 Census data has shown that there are 99 parishes in the diocese where the population comprises more than 10% people of non-Christian faiths, compared to 62 as indicated in the 2011 Census. The vast majority of parishes with this criteria, known as Presence and Engagement parishes, are in the deaneries of Burnham and Slough, Reading, Wycombe and Milton Keynes, but there are Presence and Engagement parishes across the whole of the diocese, including Oxford and Dorchester Archdeaconries. The ODCIR plans to hold a conference for these parishes in the autumn of 2024 to encourage mutual support and look at how these parishes can engage in interfaith relations.

TABLE OF COMMITTEES

Committee/Company	Chair	Secretary
Audit	Mr Simon Richards	Mr John Orridge
Appointments Committee	Bishop of Oxford	Diocesan Secretary
Bishop's Council	Bishop of Oxford and Sir Hector Sants	Diocesan Secretary
Board of Patronage	The Revd Dan Heyward	Mr Nigel Edward-Few
Buildings	Mrs Sue Scane	Mrs Sophie Orme
Closed Churches	The Ven Stephen Pullin	Mrs Maggie Metaliaj
Common Vision Steering Group	Bishop of Oxford	Ms Janet Rogers
DAC	Mrs Abigail Lloyd	Ms Liz Kitch
Development Fund Panel	Mr John Sykes	Ms Janet Rogers
Disability Oversight Group	Mr Gordon Gill (Acting)	The Revd Katie Tupling
DMPC	Bishop of Oxford	Diocesan Secretary
DT(O)L	The Revd Canon John Tattersall	Diocesan Secretary
Glebe	Mrs Sue Scane	Mrs Sophie Orme
HR Panel	Mr John Sykes	Mrs Charnelle Stylianides
Interfaith	The Ven Jonathan Chaffey	Mrs Claire Barratt
Investment	Mr Richard Horlick	Mr John Orridge
Local Ministry Pathway	Bishop of Dorchester	The Revd Dr Phil Cooke
ODBE	Dr Felix Leach	Mr Tony Wilson
ODCD	Mr Nigel Edward-Few	Mrs Fiona McNally
Finance	Sir Hector Sants	Mr John Orridge
Partnership in World Mission	Bishop of Reading	Bishop Henry Scriven
Resourcing Hub Board	Archdeacon of Buckingham	Diocesan Secretary
Rural Advisory & Reference Group	Bishop of Dorchester	The Revd Charles Chadwick
Safeguarding Panel	Mr Peter Hay	Dr Louise Whitehead
UKME Oversight Group	Bishop of Oxford	The Revd Polly Falconer

ACRONYMS

BAP Bishops' Advisory Panel
 BMO Bishops' Mission Order
 DAC Diocesan Advisory Committee
 DMPC Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee
 DT(O)L Diocesan Trustees (Oxford) Ltd
 IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
 IME2 Initial Ministerial Education for curates
 LLM Licensed Lay Minister
 LMP Local Ministry Pathway

ODBE Oxford Diocesan Board of Education
 ODBF Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance
 ODBST Oxford Diocesan Bucks School Trust
 ODCIR Oxford Diocesan Committee for Interfaith Relations
 ODCD Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
 UKME United Kingdom Minority Ethnic

TWO WAYS

Where are you going?



COME AND SEE

TWO TREASURES

Found the treasure yet?



COME AND SEE

TWO TABLETS

Loving God and your neighbour



COME AND SEE

TWO TREES

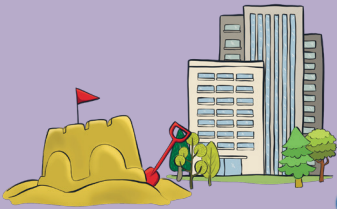
Bearing fruit in God's kingdom



COME AND SEE

TWO HOUSES


The foundation on which you build



COME AND SEE

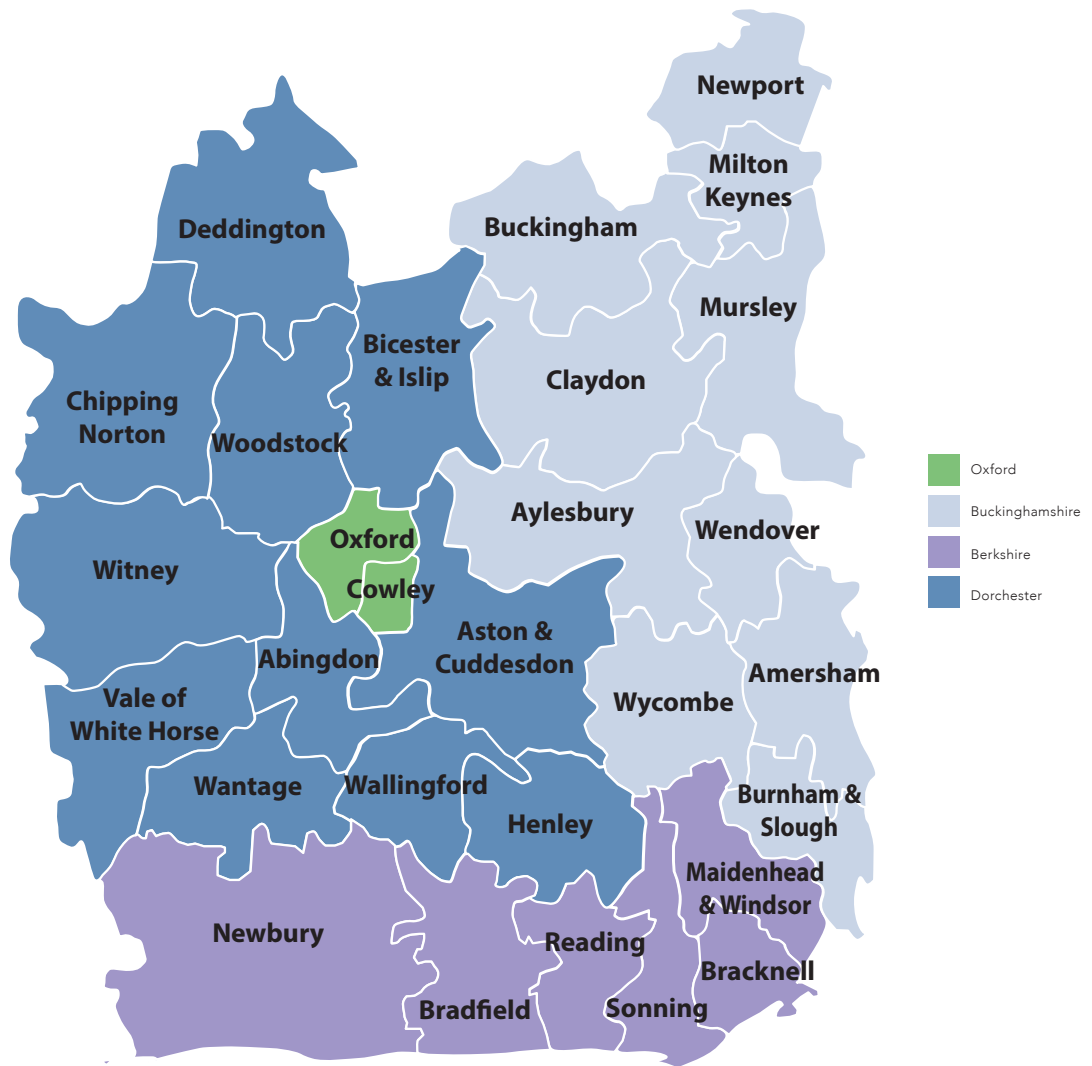
TWO QUESTIONS

Go and do likewise



COME AND SEE

"The best way to begin the day is with Come and See. It gives food for thought and reflection. Thank you."



We have more parishes and churches than any other diocese in the Church of England.

There are 808 churches in 29 deaneries serving a population of 2.5m people and 285 Church of England schools serving 60,000 pupils.

Together, we work with God and with others for the common good in every place in one of the great crossroads of the world.