

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Children and young people: update on diocesan strategy and national bid**Diocesan prayer**

Lord you make all things new

Renew by your grace our ministry with children, young people and families at this time.

Help us as your church to listen to children well; to safeguard all who are vulnerable; to sow the good seed of the gospel and to draw many to follow Jesus in the whole of their lives.

Raise up new ministers to serve the children and young people of our parishes

And help us as your church to learn from children in wonder, love and praise

Through your Son Jesus Christ, who lived as a child in Nazareth.

Amen.

Background

The March 2024 Diocesan Synod unanimously endorsed Bishop Steven's proposal for a renewed vision for '*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*' and '*to see every benefice growing and deepening its ministry to children, young people and families by 2030*

Rooted in the discernment and learning from the national children and young people (CYP) funding bid process, each of our churches were challenged to **pray**, **prioritise** ministry to children, young people, families and schools, **pay attention** to key points of transition or disconnection, **plan** next steps and **prepare** and identify leaders and ministers to take forward the ministry.

Bishop Steven called on every deanery by the end of 2024 to develop plans which would enable them to achieve this vision, with the **role of the deaneries** to:

- recognize and build from good practice
- actively listen to the voice of young people
- help parishes support one another
- cluster parishes with secondary and primary schools
- develop intentional youth and young adult ministries

In April 2024, every deanery leadership team was provided with comprehensive data related to CYP for their deanery eg demographics, schools engagement and local mission and ministry activity. Also included was guidance and a template for a simple parish mapping process.

Progress to date

All deaneries have been accompanied and supported by the Discipleship Enabler team through facilitating meetings, advising on process and providing consultancy. Many have made good progress, local energy and engagement has been high and children and young people are now a regular/standing item at many deanery synods. We know that demands on deanery teams and a lack of volunteers has impacted the planning process. However, outline plans have emerged across a majority of the deaneries. We have strong evidence that churches working together will be critical to building momentum and maximising opportunities on the ground. We are seeing

conversations and deepening relationship taking place across parishes with stories being shared and people being inspired. Plans may not have advanced as fast as some (or we) might have hoped given the intention that plans were in place in 2024, but we have emphasised that this is a five year strategy. As a Diocese and across our deaneries, we need to keep this timescale at the forefront of thinking and planning if we want to see realistic plans which effect the changes we want to see. We can easily over-commit for the 12 months ahead and underestimate what is achievable over a five year period.

For a small number of our deaneries the priority has been focussed on other concerns, including those actively implementing Deanery recovery plans. The Discipleship Enablers have been particularly aware of the demands on our smaller, rural deaneries and churches and are exploring how to provide specific support and input for them.

What do we mean by a plan? The focus must be on action and therefore the guidance from the beginning to focus on making the plans do-able, to start small but they must be intentional. We believe the key is focussing on identifying the next step(s) and then the step after that rather than requiring a complete strategy before anything can happen. This message has been received very positively and is in turn releasing energy and enabling possibilities.

Whose plans are they? Area and Diocesan teams will do all they can to resource, support and enable, but ownership of and confidence in the plan by the deanery and parishes is essential if they are to become living documents which will evolve and grow in the coming months and years.

Next steps

Both Bishop's Staff and Bishop's Council have reviewed progress and discussed these issues and affirmed the work that has already taken place in our deaneries. They also agreed that more clarity on what was expected of deaneries over the next 12 months would be helpful. Therefore, every deanery is asked to have:

1. An agreement to pray regularly for ministry to children, young people and families
2. A clear intentional leadership team identified for the deanery, meeting regularly
3. Undertaken an audit of the children and young people in the deanery (including schools)
4. Undertaken an audit of children and young people in the churches
5. A simple plan for next steps this year (including safeguarding considerations and formation and training needs)
6. An agreement to regular review, consultancy and development of plans with Area Discipleship Enablers.

Diocesan strategy and national funding proposals

The development of a funding proposal to be submitted to the national Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) has continued alongside the development of deanery plans. Over the past two years, a consistent challenge of the funding process has been to:

- i) satisfy the requirement of the national SMMIB that all proposals must demonstrate that they are rooted in a coherent, integrated Diocesan strategy which will enable significant long-term change and has the full commitment of the Diocese
- ii) align the SMMIB requirements with the stated desire of Bishop's Council that wherever possible the national funding should seek to benefit as many parishes across the Diocese as possible.

In October, the Diocesan Secretary undertook the responsibility for overseeing the funding process working through a Project Group. Under strong advice from the national Vision & Strategy team, it was clear that to satisfy both these requirements required significant shifts in the proposals developed to date:

- i) That the bid should be focussed on delivering our whole Diocesan CYP strategy
- ii) a firm commitment to the national bold outcome of doubling the numbers of CYP.

In December both Bishop's Staff and Bishop's Council gave their strong support:

- i. confirming their commitment to our CYP strategy as a top priority for the next 5 years
- ii. endorsing the key outcome of doubling the numbers of CYP in our church communities in the diocese enabled by this bid and through plans prepared by all the deaneries

The proposals developed represent two years of careful and often difficult work by a large team. Together the breadth of the proposals represents the potential to make a transformative difference to the lives of children and young people and our churches across the Diocese. They are bold, challenging and seek wherever possible to support and resource the delivery of the deanery plans as they emerge in the coming months. Some of the ways they will serve our parishes is by:

- providing an enhanced Diocesan Fund (drawing on our well-tested Development Fund) to grow ministry where there are low levels of CYP engaged week by week and either fast-growing population or estates/ low-income communities (the majority of children and young people in the diocese are based in these parishes)
- providing training and support interventions to support new and existing CYP volunteers and ministers across the whole diocese
- supporting and resourcing clergy to grow new ministry where they are in all types of setting across the diocese
- Deepening the relationship with our local schools through prayer spaces and seeking to facilitate an increase in our church communities as a consequence
- Supporting and nurturing young people as they transition to young adults

The core proposals were agreed by Bishop's Council at their meeting on 3 December. The full proposals and bid were submitted to SMMIB on 16 January following approval by Bishop Steven, Sir Hector Sants (chair DBF) and the Diocesan Secretary under the delegated power given by Bishop's Council at their December meeting. The SMMI Board meet on 27 February and we hope to be able to report a positive outcome to the Synod when we meet.

Andrew Anderson-Gear
Director of Mission & Ministry
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