

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

Children and Youth Ministry: Update and invitation to reflect on progress to date

Background

1. In March 2024, Diocesan Synod, led by Bishop Steven, unanimously adopted the vision 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*'. We committed to engaging more effectively in ministry with children and young people (CYM) as active participants in, and contributors to, God's mission and the life of the Church through creating deanery and parish plans to reflect the culture shifts and priorities first set out in the 2020 diocesan report 'Disciples Together'.
2. In February 2025, Diocesan Synod noted the progress made in developing deanery plans and endorsed a bid to the national Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) for major investments in CYM across the diocese in support of them. However, as reported to Synod in November, in July 2025 we received the unexpected news that the Archbishops' Council had made the decision the Diocese would no longer be eligible for any of the 2026-2028 allocation of funds. This was a major disappointment, given the strength of the bid and the huge amount of time and resource invested across deaneries and by diocesan staff.
3. Despite the setback on SMMIB funding, we continue to pursue the culture shifts and priorities underpinning our long-term CYM strategy and all that is being discerned and implemented through evolving deanery plans. We continue to work towards a clear ambition to double the number of CYPs connecting with worshipping communities and growing as disciples over the next 5 years.
4. In the light of our clear commitment to CYM, at its meeting In October 2025, Bishop's Council resolved that we should allocate some additional diocesan resource in pursuit of the strategy agreed by Diocesan Synod. While we can't make the same scale and pace of investments as a SMMIB bid would allow, we can seek to focus resources in areas which we know from our own experience and learning from national initiatives have the greatest impact in deaneries and parishes. We are also maximising the impact of the Development Fund through clearly targeted funding in support of related projects.

Key elements in our approach to Children and Youth Ministry

5. We continue to focus on making the five culture shifts identified in 'Disciples Together':
 - Growing the understanding of children and young people as active participants and pilgrims in worshipping communities not 'problems' or 'the church of tomorrow' etc
 - Engaging with children, young people and families intergenerationally rather than largely through separate programmes
 - Helping adults have confidence as 'intentional disciplers' of children and young people rather than 'vague influencers'
 - a. Enabling those working with children and young people to sense they are 'called', 'formed' and properly 'equipped' for their roles rather than feeling more like 'pressed volunteers'.
 - b. 'Being the change, we want to see' – helping all parishes to see their opportunities to grow as 'all-age communities of grace' themselves and in creative partnerships across deaneries

6. Key elements in our strategy to achieve the culture shifts and double the number of children and young people engaging with our worshipping communities over the next five years:

Priority	Action over the last year	Key indicators for the impact we want to see
Increasing capacity in the CYM team to provide direct support to deanery plans and parishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for a New Head of CYM post • CYM team refining strategy and consulting with area teams and deaneries • Parish support to pray, map opportunities and develop new 'discipleship pathways' 	<p>All deanery leadership teams being supported in evolving Deanery Plans or in some cases developing them with new leadership.</p> <p>At least 150 parishes developing plans and discipleship pathways. Parishes deepening partnerships with schools.</p>
Amplifying CYP's voice across the diocese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYM team working at participation at every level of church and diocesan life – working with young people • Sharing Amplify resource 	<p>CYPs increasingly involved and visible at all levels of diocesan life e.g. as in the Clergy conference and the Vacancy in See process</p>
Investing in CYM Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubling training budget for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Launchpad (clergy) ○ Youthscape and Children's Essentials (CYM workers) ○ Heart to Heart (volunteers) ○ Space Makers (schools) ○ 'Training the trainers' ○ Investment in IME, CMD and 'training the trainers' • New learning Hub training streams being developed 	<p>Cohorts of clergy, CYM workers and volunteers continuously undertaking training geared to roles and contexts</p> <p>Rolled out into schools in all areas</p> <p>Tailored training for all in ministry roles</p> <p>Specific modules in place for key priorities e.g. church/home/schools</p>
Direct support and 'consultancy' for paid and volunteer CYM workers in parishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of CYM team • Depth retreat and Day events • Amplify Adventure (for young leaders) 	<p>Up to 100 people taking up new paid CYM roles.</p> <p>Up to 1000 new CYM volunteers.</p>
Establishing 'Pathfinder Clusters' to pioneer and pilot innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYM team working with area teams to identify and/or develop these in each archdeaconry 	<p>2-3 Pathfinder areas of work in each area</p> <p>Targeted Development Fund grants leading into sustainable projects</p>
Developing the Church/School/Home relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYM team collaborating with new DBE advisor • Work on expanding Prayer Spaces into Berks and Bucks 	<p>Resources hubs for Prayer spaces established in each area and basis for new Church/school/home partnerships</p>
'YouShape' programme to disciple 18-30s and to grow vocations and CYM leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 pilot hubs running • Hub planned for MK • Bursary fund created to ensure no barriers to participation 	<p>YouShape running in a sustainable way throughout the diocese</p> <p>Increased vocations and specifically seeing this flow into CYM roles</p>

Questions for reflection, discussion and feedback

1. Are we beginning to see any evidence of the impact of this work in deanery and parish level plans and activities?
2. How much progress do we sense has been made with the key shifts we want to see in culture and understanding around children and young people?
3. How can we share in amplifying the voices and including children and young people in every aspect of our life together as a diocese?

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