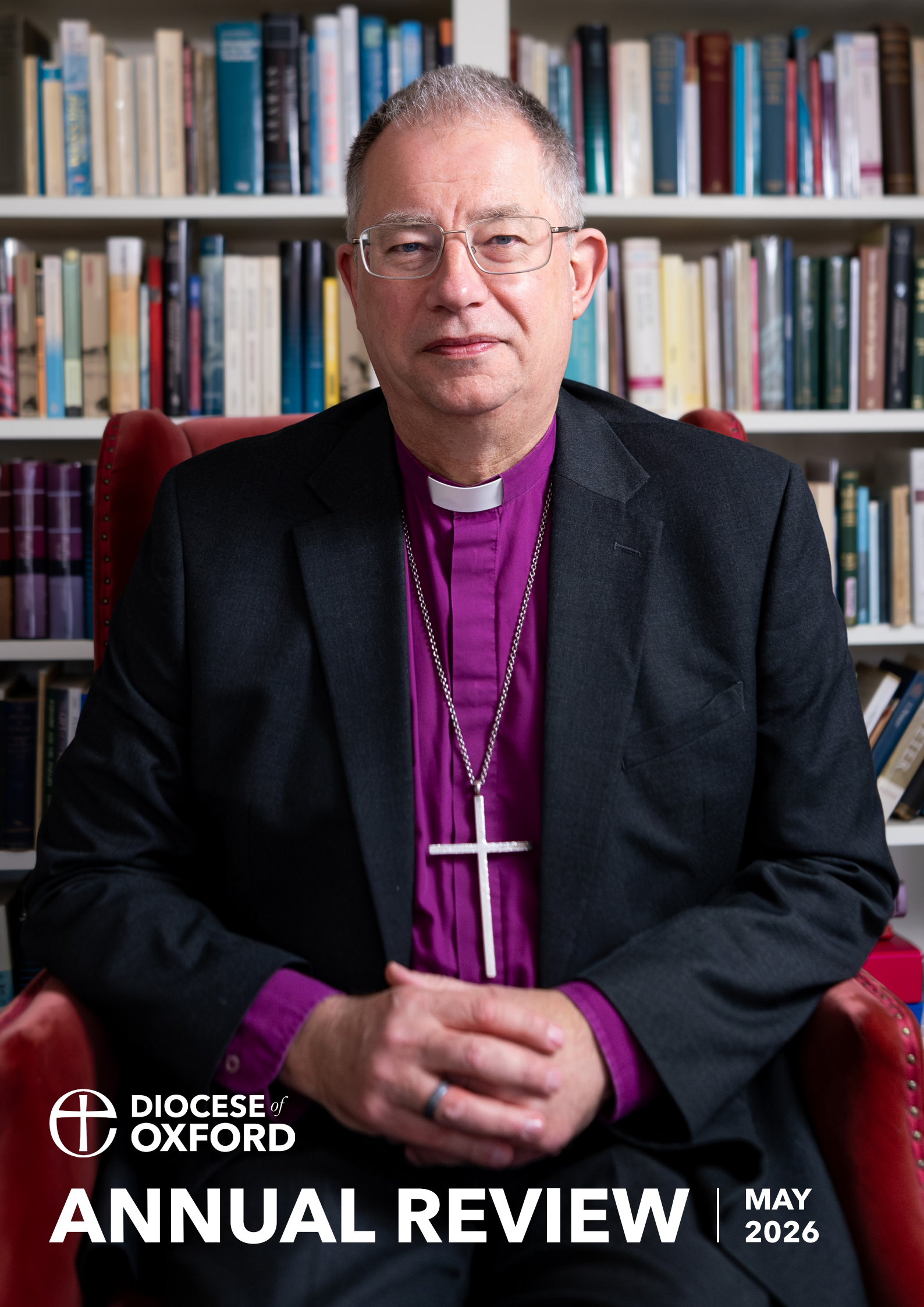


DIOCESE of OXFORD

ANNUAL REVIEW | MAY 2026

FROM MARK HUMPHRISS, OUR DIOCESAN SECRETARY

The past year has been one in which we have again seen the faithfulness of God through the work carried out in parishes, schools and chaplaincies, and in Church House and the area offices.

Bishop's Council continues to provide oversight for much of this work on behalf of Diocesan Synod.

Strategic discussions this year have focused on Milton Keynes and on our common vision areas, including discipleship, the environment and our resourcing hubs.

Several of these initiatives are now so well established that they have become part of our regular pattern of work.

We committed additional funds to ministry with children and young people. Diocesan Synod in March 2026 and our clergy conference in 2025 engaged directly with young people, and initiatives such as Launchpad and YouShape are beginning to flourish.

Throughout the autumn we devoted considerable resources to supporting those affected by a data breach involving an external provider of our DBS checks, and to undertaking the subsequent procurement process for a new provider.

We acknowledge that we are currently in a reasonable financial position and remain deeply grateful for parish share and our investment assets, which make this possible.

National funding changes have also enabled a higher increase in clergy stipends in April 2026.

As we give thanks for the ministry of Bishop Steven, the work of the Vacancy in See Committee became a major focus between December and March.

The Statement of Needs, shaped by the survey to which more than 2,700 people responded, serves as an excellent introduction to the diocese and will play a key part in the discernment of our new Bishop.

We were pleased to welcome the Revd Canon Andrew Blyth as Director of Mission and Ministry and Kim Grosvenor as Director of Secretariat.

I offer my sincere thanks to those who serve on our committees and to our staff, who work tirelessly and collaboratively with our parishes, schools and communities, all for the glory of God.

FROM BISHOP STEVEN

Last year held many joys in the Diocese of Oxford, as we welcomed Bishop Dave Bull and Bishop Mary Gregory to their ministry with us in Buckingham and Reading.

Their care for their parishes, clergy and schools has been a blessing, and we give thanks to God for their new ministries.

Bishop Mary visited our link Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman in South Africa in the autumn. And Bishop Dave, as well as visiting 102 of the Buckinghamshire churches in his first year, has taken on the leadership of our vital equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.

It was wonderful, as always, to be present at the ordinations of new priests and deacons at Petertide and Michaelmas. Christ Church celebrated 500 years since its foundation as Cardinal College in 1525.

We also celebrated the installation of a new stained-glass window by Thomas Denny, illuminating the story of the Prodigal Son with its themes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

It is impossible to name all the achievements of the parishes in such a short introduction. Of particular note is the thriving community of Hong Kongers worshipping at Trinity Church, Earley, encouraged in their faith by the team in Berkshire.

The clergy conference was a highlight of the year as we welcomed 100 young people from four of our secondary schools to lead us in worship and to help us understand their hopes for the church and for the world.

The year hasn't been without its challenges. We continue to work with survivors of abuse at the hands of the church – abuse for which we are profoundly sorry.

I want to pay tribute to the parish safeguarding officers across the diocese and the team in Church House for the work they do to learn from past failings and keep our congregations safe.

As I began this message with the start of new ministries, I acknowledge a significant milestone in my own as I prepare to retire in July. It has been a privilege to serve God and all of you in the diocese for the last ten years.

My heart is very full as we prepare to move to St Albans: full of thanksgiving for so many wonderful churches and people; for all I've learned; and of hope for the future.

I know I leave the diocese in safe hands as we await the appointment of a new Diocesan Bishop. The teams working to serve our parishes, schools, clergy, lay ministers and volunteers provide wisdom, advice and support every day of the year, and Bishop Gavin's interim leadership will continue to prioritise that. We are here to serve you.

I close by thanking you all for your kindness – and, naturally, challenge – to me over the years. Both have been welcome.

May God richly bless you all.

OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR

May

Around 250 people from 11 churches across Wycombe united for faith and fun at the second annual Wycombe Youth Weekend.

The Ven Guy Elsmore, Archdeacon of Buckingham, announced his retirement. Guy served the first 23 years of his ministry in and around Liverpool, then joined the Diocese of Oxford in 2016.

At the diocese's triennial clergy conference in Derbyshire, delegates heard a series of speakers and workshop leaders on the topic Chosen, Called and Commissioned. The highlight was a visit from 100 pupils at four of our Church of England schools.

We received the very sad news that our colleague and friend Steven Buckley died peacefully at home with his family with him. Steven was our Director of Communications from 2017 to 2024. His Christian faith and his sense of humour remained strong until the end of his life.

Guy Elsmore retired as Archdeacon of Buckingham in May

June

There were celebrations and selfies as 18 deacons were ordained priest at services around the diocese. Services took place at Reading Minster, led by Bishop Mary; St Peter and St Paul's Church in Great Missenden, led by Bishop Dave; Dorchester Abbey, led by Bishop Gavin; and at St Mary's Church in Kidlington, led by Bishop Steven.

The following Saturday 20 new deacons were ordained. Two services took place on the day, with Bishop Dave ordaining 13 candidates in the morning and Bishop Mary ordaining a further seven in the afternoon.

July

Bishop Steven and Alison Riggs from our Environment team were part of the Act Now, Change Forever mass lobby in Westminster.

Young people from around the diocese gathered at Adventure Plus in Clanfield for the annual youth camp – Amplify Adventure.

August

Bishop Steven responded to Nigel Farage's announcement of the Reform Party's immigration policy with an open letter. In the letter, Bishop Steven called for more compassion in the discussion around the issues and set out how he profoundly disagrees with the arguments made.

September

Bishop Mary reflected on her recent visit to our link diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman, and how true family is formed not through flags or narrow definitions of belonging, but through Jesus – where difference is embraced and diversity celebrated.

We held a licensing service in the Church House Chapel, where the Revd Andrew Blyth was licensed as our Director of Mission and Ministry, and the Revd Philippa White was licensed as Bishop's Chaplain.

Bishop Steven joins a selfie at St Mary's Kidlington where he led an ordination service in June

Young people from the diocese attended the Amplify Adventure youth camp in July

The Revd Paul Cowan was licensed as Associate Archdeacon of Reading.

Bishop Mary embarked on a challenge to create a wall hanging made up of 180 hearts to represent the churches in her care. It now hangs in her office as a representation of her prayers for her episcopal area.

October

A milestone was reached as the amount handed out by the diocese to parishes since the Development Fund was launched passed the £5million mark.

The fund was established in 2019 to give up to £1million a year for the growing needs of communities in the diocese.

November

Six candidates were licensed for lay ministry at the annual service for Licensed Lay Ministers at Christ Church Cathedral.

The Revd Canon Dr Will Lamb, Vicar of the University Church, Oxford, met Pope Leo in Rome. One of his predecessors, St John Henry Newman, had served as Vicar of the University Church from 1828-1843.

More than 150 Parish Safeguarding Officers and church leaders marked Safeguarding

Eight people were made honorary canons at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford in January. From left: Revd Sami Watts, Revd Keith Dennett, Revd Andrew Blyth, Revd Peter Day, Revd Jon Salmon, Revd Margaret Dixon, Richard Ashfield and Revd Margreet Armistead

Sunday together with a special day of reflection and renewed commitment to caring for the most vulnerable in our churches.

The afternoon included powerful contributions from the Oxford Survivor Group, as well as a challenging address from Bishop Steven.

December

Our bishops urged churches across the diocese to continue to build strong and united communities across the Thames Valley ahead of a rally held in London purporting to put 'Christ back into Christmas'.

Bishop Steven said: "Jesus was born a refugee, in the Middle East and in poverty, running from those who were intent on harming him. The adoption of Christian values to exclude or ostracise others is the exact opposite of Jesus' teachings."

Simon Hill was announced as Head of Children and Youth Ministry – a new post in the diocese.

January

The Bishops of Oxford and Reading were in attendance as Bishop Sarah Mullally became the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury in a ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral, ahead of her installation in Canterbury in May.

Direct local involvement came from Revd Jo Allen, team vicar of Clifton Hampden and Burcot, Culham and Long with Little Wittenham, and Revd Mark Nam, vicar of St John the Evangelist in Woodley, who were among those delivering the charge.

Eight people were made honorary canons and three candidates were admitted to the Order of St Frideswide during Evensong at Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford.

February

Bishop Steven attended his final General Synod before his retirement, and was bid a fond farewell on the final day.

At her first General Synod as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Sarah Mullally gave thanks to Bishop Steven for his "wisdom, care and focus".

She said: "Throughout his ministering, the furthering of God's kingdom has rightly been at the heart of all that he has done and of his calling."

March

The Ven Cassa Messervy became the new Archdeacon of Buckingham in a service of collation and installation at St Mary's in Aylesbury.

The Bishop of Buckingham said: "Having first met Cassa over a decade ago, I know she brings to the role both vibrant faith and significant leadership gifts."

Diocesan Synod was blessed by the presence and contributions of young people from across the diocese in its first meeting of 2026.

A panel of teenagers from Aylesbury, Reading and Abingdon shared openly about faith, church and the challenges of living as Christians.

The meeting also saw Bishop Steven's final presidential address before his retirement this summer.

Reflecting on his time at the diocese, Bishop Steven said: "Ten years ago, as a diocese, we addressed the question of our common vision. We asked first what kind of church we are called to be. Our second question followed from the first: what are we called to do together at this time?"

April

Bishop Gavin led a confirmation service for a 93-year-old Oxfordshire care home resident. Former RAF officer Dennis Minns was confirmed at Sanctuary Care's Watlington & District Residential and Nursing Home.

Bishop Santhosh (first from right) led a delegation from the Diocese of Nandyal

Diocesean Synod in March was blessed by the presence of young people from the diocese

Bishop Mary also led a memorable service at St Mary's Church, Great Shefford. Eight candidates from across the West Downland Benefice gathered as Bishop Mary presided over confirmations, baptisms and the renewal of baptism vows, before wading into the River Lambourn alongside them.

Bishop Mary said: "To see the joy on people's faces as they emerged from the waters, and to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit was wonderful."

Meanwhile, 67 teenagers were confirmed across two services led by Bishop Dave in the parish of Eton.

Nearly 1,000 people attended to witness the ceremonies, including students from Eton College.

The Rt Revd Kamanuri Santhosh Prasanna Rao was welcomed to Church House by the Bishop of Oxford on his first visit to us since becoming Bishop of Nandyal, our link diocese, in 2025.

His visit included time in each area of the diocese, learning about the life and ministry of churches across the region.

Bishop Santhosh said: "Bishop Steven is a very good man and it was important that we came to see him before his retirement."

OUR EPISCOPAL AREAS

Our four episcopal areas – Berkshire, Buckingham, Dorchester and Oxford – serve the parishes in their geographic area, supporting their ministry, initiatives and priorities. Below, our area teams share their reflections on how the past year has been significant for them.

Berkshire

Across Reading, a growing network of people is working together to support and encourage young people in their faith and in their everyday lives.

This network brings together leaders from churches and schools, organisations such as Reach, who faithfully serve schools through RE and PSHE lessons, assemblies, mentoring and Christian Union groups, alongside some clergy and dedicated volunteers who share a passion for young people and a desire to engage in meaningful conversation.

Meeting each Thursday morning, this group offers more than just a regular gathering. It provides a steady and nurturing space where leaders can come as they are, to be encouraged, supported and refreshed.

With eight to 15 leaders gathering consistently, a deep sense of trust, friendship and shared calling has been formed.

This spirit of togetherness has been further enriched through connection with Casar (Chaplains and Schools Workers Around Reading).

From this place of unity and prayerful listening, a shared vision has begun to take shape, one that holds the young people of Reading at its heart.

Termly Reading Youth Nights have become an outworking of this vision.

At the most recent gathering in March, 105 young people came together, many encountering faith in new ways.

Reading's youth leaders – a vibrant and deeply committed community

Some did so for the first time, while others took meaningful steps forward in their journey.

Churches are seeing young people inspired by worship, faith that is eager to share with others, and young people who may not be regular church attendees, or who know little about faith, excited to come along and be part of these events

Across last year, the Reading Youth Nights saw more than 300 young people attend.

Building on this momentum, July 2025 saw the first ever Reading Youth Day at Greyfriars Church, welcoming around 130 young people from across the town.

What is emerging in Reading is a flourishing and hope-filled ecumenical family of leaders choosing to walk together, pray together and invest faithfully in the next generation.

In addition to the wonderful youth ministry work being done, the past year has seen a focus on developing the theology of the deanery, and identifying and developing emergent leaders.

Work has begun on creating a community of practice among lay and ordained leaders in rural areas, with a shared commitment to listening and an encouragement to explore

incarnational ministry, to experiment, and to follow the ancient paths.

Rural parishes are exploring what it means to have permission to 'dream small'.

One stand-out example of good practice in rural ministry is St James, Leckhampstead, where the church becomes a pop-up pub for the whole community, staging karaoke nights and performances by bands. This ministry of hospitality is matched with invitations to explore faith through Alpha.

A significant story for the episcopal area is the strong growth of Hong Konger church communities in and around Reading. This continues to bring great joy and is covered elsewhere in this publication.

Other inspirational stories from around the episcopal area include All Saints in Maidenhead, where important work is being done with refugee communities, while at St Andrews, Clewer, a wild church initiative involves schoolchildren in outdoor worship.

Buckingham

Throughout 2025, Buckingham Archdeaconry found itself living with a level of change that could generously be described as challenging.

The year was marked by a significant number of vacancies, including those of the Bishop and the Archdeacon, which inevitably created uncertainty and stretched people and systems.

At times, it felt as though the gaps were as noticeable as the activity, and the weight of responsibility was keenly felt across the area.

The arrival of Bishop Dave in March brought a renewed sense of direction and energy.

> *This was demanding work, but also deeply hopeful, as churches explored new ways of collaborating and reimagining their future.*

His determination to be present and visible was evident in his commitment to visit more than 100 churches within his first year.

These visits were more than symbolic. They offered encouragement, affirmed local ministry and helped rebuild momentum at a time when many parishes were feeling tired or unsettled after prolonged periods without stable leadership.

At its peak, the number of parish vacancies reached 31, a figure that in itself tells a powerful story.

Yet within this challenge lay unexpected opportunity. The absence of incumbents gave space for new conversations and bolder thinking.

The area team was able to support imaginative and missional approaches to ministry, including two whole-deanery reorganisations. This was demanding work, but also deeply hopeful, as churches explored new ways of collaborating and reimagining their future.

None of this could have been achieved in isolation. The year was characterised by close working with churchwardens, PCCs, supporting clergy, patrons, diocesan colleagues and a wide range of committed volunteers.

Strong communication proved essential, particularly in navigating the complexities of vacancy management and appointments.

Constructive relationships with the deaneries, the registry, property and HR teams, and many others helped ensure that, despite inevitable delays and complications, processes moved forward with clarity and care.

One of the more striking and life-giving developments has been the inclusion of local schools in interview processes. This has repeatedly reminded us of the wider communities our churches serve.

The questions posed by children are often thoughtful, direct and surprisingly perceptive, asked with a sincerity that cuts straight to the heart of vocation and ministry. Their involvement has added warmth, honesty and

perspective to the process, and has been a quiet but powerful sign of hope for the future.

Taken together, the last year has been one of resilience, creativity and shared endeavour.

While it began with absence and uncertainty, it has increasingly been shaped by presence, collaboration and a renewed sense of possibility.

Dorchester

The year 2025 has been one of steady, purposeful development for the Dorchester Area Team, marked by a focus on children, families and young people as central to the Church's growth, life and future.

Across the area, there has been growing recognition that this work is a vital expression of mission, hospitality and discipleship.

Much of the team's energy this year has been directed towards encouragement, conversation and practical support, helping parishes to move from concern or aspiration into confident action.

Deanery-wide conversations played a significant role in shaping this direction.

By creating space for shared honesty about challenges and capacity, alongside opportunities to hear inspiring practice from elsewhere, these gatherings helped parishes to see what might be possible when they worked together.

They also highlighted the importance of partnership, training and creative thinking in enabling sustainable ministry with children and young people.

One particularly encouraging outcome of these conversations has been the launch of a new holiday club in Bicester.

Early in the year, those interested in strengthening ministry with children and families gathered to hear Pat Reading, director of Lighthouse Central.

Inspired by what they heard, three volunteers returned to their parish and, with PCC support and agreed funding, moved swiftly from idea to implementation.

Just 179 days later, Bicester Lighthouse came to life at St Edburg's Primary School in August.

Over five days, 56 children took part, supported by five young leaders and 23 adult volunteers drawn from across the benefice.

Notably, most of the children had no prior connection with the church, making the club a genuine point of encounter rather than an inward-facing activity.

The success of Bicester Lighthouse reflects the wider impact of the Dorchester Area Team's approach in 2025.

By listening carefully, encouraging initiative and walking alongside parishes, the team has helped turn vision into reality.

This same spirit is evident in the continued support offered to churchwardens through gatherings for training, conversation and mutual encouragement, in collaboration with the Oxford team.

These events remain key moments in the year, recognising and resourcing those who offer their time and skills so generously.

Sessions this year included ministry with children and young people, annual meetings and the support available from parish development advisers, alongside work on generous giving, church buildings, vacancy processes and environmental initiatives.

A representative of the team has also engaged with the National Church's Rural Mission Learning Community, taking part in residentials and ongoing discussions. Lessons from this work are helping to shape a diocesan approach to rural mission.

Among the year's other highlights were the

> *By listening carefully, encouraging initiative and walking alongside parishes, the team has helped turn vision into reality.*

Lent quiet days for clergy and lay ministers, led by Revd Charlie Kerr. These offered a much-valued opportunity to step back, find space and return refreshed.

Oxford

The year 2025 marked a resonant moment in the life of Christ Church, as it reached its 500th anniversary.

Five centuries earlier, in 1525, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey set in motion a bold vision when he cleared the site of St Frideswide's Priory to establish what he hoped would be a great new centre of learning.

Adopted and reshaped by King Henry VIII, the project became Christ Church in 1546, founded as a partnership between a college of the University of Oxford and the cathedral church of the diocese.

Half a millennium on, the context is vastly changed, yet the twin purposes at the heart of the foundation remain constant. Christ Church continues to hold together the life of mind and the life of faith.

The enduring strength of Christ Church lies precisely in this shared inheritance.

The anniversary year offered an opportunity not only to look back, but also to gather, reflect and celebrate in the present.

From Tudor-themed banquets and dramatic performances rooted in the foundation's origins, to lectures by leading figures from academia, public life and the Church, the programme reflected the continuing relevance of Christ Church's voice in contemporary discourse.

Exhibitions explored Wolsey's legacy and the artistic and intellectual history of the college, while concerts and festivals celebrated five centuries of musical tradition within the cathedral.

Beyond Christ Church itself, the past year has also seen interfaith engagement remain central to the work of the diocese within the Oxford episcopal area.

Longstanding relationships between faith communities in the city have been further strengthened, particularly in the context of the Israel-Gaza conflict.

Sunlight streams into Christ Church during 500th anniversary celebrations

These relationships continue to be expressed through shared initiatives such as iftars and friendship walks, bringing together participants from mosques, synagogues and churches in a spirit of mutual understanding.

Across the city, there is much to be proud of.

Support for disadvantaged communities remains a vital part of our work.

At St Frideswide's Church in Osney, the continued success of the weekly free community meal means that plans are under way to create a new servery to meet demand.

Elsewhere, initiatives such as the food larder at Cutteslowe Church and The Gatehouse at St Giles' continue to offer essential support.

Meanwhile, St Mary and St John in East Oxford has recently secured a significant grant from the National Lottery towards capital repairs and improving accessibility and community engagement.

In a youthful city like Oxford, work with young people remains a central priority.

The YouShape youth pilot at St Matthew's and St Luke's in Grandpont has provided new opportunities for engagement, while across the city there has been strong attendance from young people at services, with college chapels in particular reporting full pews.

MISSION AND MINISTRY

As the people of God we are chosen, called and commissioned to share in every aspect of His mission and ministry.

Over the past year our teams have supported hundreds of people in parishes, schools and chaplaincies as they respond to local needs and take part in the missional priorities we continue to discern together.

Discipleship and Evangelism

It was encouraging once again to see Bishop Steven's Come and See Lent resources used in such a wide variety of parish settings, with material sent to more than 3,000 people.

For young adults the YouShape initiative brought together 18 to 30-year-olds from nine parishes in Oxford, Aylesbury and Wycombe deaneries for a year of community building, gathering and learning.

Many spoke of greater confidence in faith and a deeper sense of how God might be calling them to serve.

To help churches connect with people who want to explore or grow in following Jesus we developed new resources for parishes and supported leaders in specific ministry contexts.

The pilot learning community for those serving in market towns continued successfully and a learning community for rural contexts was launched.

Our Generous Giving work also continued to expand. Stanton St John and Marsh Gibbon were among the first to test a new contactless donation technology designed for churches without wi-fi.

YouShape brought together 18 to 30-year-olds from nine parishes

Children and Youth

The Discipleship Enabler team helped drive several significant developments in children and youth ministry.

One-hundred school pupils took part in the Clergy Conference.

Young people shared faith stories and experiences of evangelism at Diocesan Synod.

Sixty young people from across the archdeaconries came to the Amplify camp in the summer and Aylesbury Deanery leaders have since created their own weekend away based on its model.

The Launchpad training programme was piloted with clergy in Dorchester, Buckingham and Berkshire to help develop confidence and strategy in places with limited youth or children's work. With excellent feedback, it will now be rolled out more widely.

In Slough the team supported renewed collaboration among youth workers and clergy at St Paul's and across the deanery, with a clear rise in shared energy and vision.

Reading hosted its first youth deanery day with support from the Development Fund. Some 130 people from 23 churches took part in workshops, a dodgeball tournament, evening worship session and more.

In Aylesbury we worked with St Mary's to invest in young people through pop-up cafes and home groups, with encouraging signs of growth in both numbers and faith.

Growing New Congregations

We continued to support five resourcing hubs across the diocese.

In Reading the congregations planted for Hong Kong Christians grew significantly.

Congregations for Hong Kong Christians in the Reading area grew significantly this year

In Milton Keynes the communities at St Frideswide's and St Mary's Bletchley continued to deepen engagement.

From St Andrew's High Wycombe a team continued to nurture the worshipping community at Bourne End, and lessons from St Paul's Slough are being shared more widely.

Ministry Training and Support

Through the digital Learning Hub the Formation for Ministry team ran an extensive range of courses to equip those involved in parish ministry.

St Peter's Quarrendon sent four people on the Introducing Pastoral Care course and, with new confidence, they created a pastoral approach suited to their diverse community.

One participant described the content as deep and wide and said it had given them confidence as well as insight into best practice.

The IME team supported 101 curates across 81 benefices in 2025. They ran 52 courses and six curates graduated with a degree.

Poverty and Inequality

We worked with many parishes committed to addressing poverty and injustice

St Frideswide's Water Eaton used principles of community organising to secure a long-awaited bridge and path on Eaton Leys.

Reading Minster continued to support the night-time economy in partnership with Street Pastors, and St Michael and All Angels Summertown helped asylum seekers access public transport.

Environment Care

By the end of the year almost 350 churches and church halls had made use of our subsidised energy audit to plan their route towards net zero. More than 270 churches had begun their Eco Church journey and 50 had reached the silver award.

St John's Crowthorne received Net Zero Carbon Preparation funding for decarbonised heating design work.

Their Mustard Seed Project has now become part of the church's mission and the parish speaks with significant confidence about their commitment to care for the planet and offer warm and inviting space for the community.

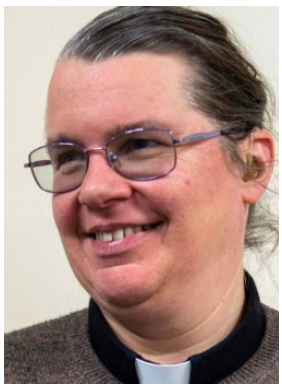
Across the diocese, volunteer Deanery Environmental Leads have arranged training, events and advocacy.

These included St Michael's Aston Tirrold's Show the Love event, a Carbon Literacy course for Lambourn congregations and the Milton Keynes Eco Church network.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We remain committed to strengthening equality, diversity and inclusion across the diocese. In a challenging cultural climate, we continue to uphold the biblical truth that God does not show favouritism.

Deaf Ministry and Inclusion



Revd Dr Hannah Lewis (pictured) became the leader of Slough Deaf Centre and presided at several significant Deaf Community events, including the Royal Foundation Christmas Carol Service. She has created accessible safeguarding materials, including BSL videos, and contributed to national developments in Deaf ministry. Her work includes shaping a new Deaf lay ministry course and taking part in disability theology groups. Visibility within the Deaf community has grown, although limited BSL access and pastoral capacity remain ongoing challenges.

Disability

Revd Kt Tupling carried out accessibility site visits, offered training for clergy and staff, and provided mentoring for disabled and neurodivergent clergy. She continued her role as chair of the national network of Diocesan Disability Advisers. Preparatory work has been completed to support the launch of new disability resources and future initiatives.

Social Justice and Poverty

Hannah Ling leads diocesan work on poverty and inequality, including planning engagement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, strengthening collaboration among church leaders and providing support to the LGBTQIA+ chaplaincy team. For the latter, she facilitates the diocesan network, responds to the implications of recent legal rulings on trans inclusion, and is developing guidance for churches.

Women's Ministry

Revd Jane Haslam convenes the diocesan network for women's ministry, planning retreats and discussions on themes such as stalking and menopause. The appointment of a female Bishop of Reading and a female Archdeacon of Buckingham has strengthened the voice of women within the Bishop's Staff Team and brought further attention to the challenges still faced by women in some parishes and communities.

Racial Justice

Revd Polly Falconer (pictured) has had an increased demand for racial bias training, particularly in schools and among leadership teams. Her work includes supporting diverse communities, working with diaspora churches and addressing heritage disputes. There was strong engagement around Black History Month and broader antiracism activity. Three new leaders for the UKME Chapter have increased the support available to parish clergy.

Neurodiversity

The EDI Committee has begun drawing together the various strands of neurodiversity work. This will lead to the launch of a Clergy Neurodiversity Forum in the first half of 2026, overseen by Jane Myers and Revd Jane Hemmings.

SAFEGUARDING

Throughout the year, the safeguarding team worked closely with PSOs, clergy, lay leaders and volunteers to support the communities we serve and to help ensure safe churches across the diocese.

During 2025, the team responded to an increasing number of safeguarding concerns.

The team received an average of 33 safeguarding referrals per month, a substantial rise from the monthly average of 18 in 2024.

In addition, the team managed an average of 117 safeguarding enquiries per month (excluding training enquiries), compared with 89 per month in 2024.

These enquiries typically related to low-level concerns, safer recruitment and wider areas of preventative safeguarding practice.

Training continued to be a central part of our safeguarding provision, with 9,458 participants engaging in training over the year.

The team delivered 126 sessions covering the full safeguarding training pathways, including leadership, permission to officiate (PTO), Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) inductions and domestic abuse awareness.

Where participants faced challenges accessing online training, our volunteer trainers and PSOs delivered in-person sessions in parishes.

We also ran two domestic abuse sessions in partnership with Reducing the Risk, a session on perpetrators of sexual abuse, and two sessions on financial abuse that were delivered jointly with Age UK.

With a view to making support easier to access, the Area Safeguarding Advisers hosted 23 drop-ins for PSOs throughout the year.

They also ran four dedicated events offering further opportunities for PSOs to meet their adviser and receive tailored guidance.

In November, a service of thanksgiving was held at Christ Church Cathedral to recognise the vital contribution of our PSOs.

More than 100 PSOs attended the service and accompanying workshops, reflecting the strong commitment across our parishes to maintaining safe churches.

Bishops Dave and Gavin at November's safeguarding service at Christ Church

EDUCATION

The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE) supports 283 schools across nine local authorities and works with more than 20 multi-academy trusts (MATs) with Church school members.

Working with such a large family of schools and trusts, all founded on Christian principles of service and generosity, we aim at all times to embody the ODBE values of being contemplative, compassionate and courageous.

Our Property and School Adviser teams provide a wide range of services to help schools deliver the best possible outcomes.

These include training, the appointment of approximately 1,000 governors each year, advice on admissions policies, support for site trustees on property matters, and the organisation of building projects in voluntary aided schools and academies.

Projects range from small maintenance works to major extensions and refurbishments.

SIAMS

SIAMS, the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools, remains a key part of Church school life. Inspections explore how a school's theologically rooted Christian vision shapes its work and enables it to live out its foundation.

Inspectors also consider the flourishing of the school community through collective worship, the standards of religious education and the wider spiritual development of pupils.

Our advisers have offered training throughout the year to equip school leaders, staff, governors and trustees with the knowledge and confidence needed to uphold their school's Christian vision.

During the 2025/26 academic year, 31 SIAMS inspections have taken place (25 completed) and all have resulted the highest outcome (Judgement 1).

Property Team

We continue to deliver capital works across voluntary aided schools and some academies, focusing on roofs, boilers and health and safety projects, with annual expenditure of around £5million.

Work is progressing well on the new zero carbon St Nicholas School in Wallingford as it prepares to become a full primary and move to a new site in September 2026.

One of our priorities remains carbon reduction, although this depends on securing government funding to replace fossil fuel boilers.

We are pleased to have secured a further £585,000 to remove gas and oil boilers at Newbury St Nicolas Junior School, Goring Primary and North Hinksey Primary.

Two additional bids, submitted on behalf of the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust MAT, have secured initial design funding to replace boilers with zero carbon alternatives at Adderbury Christopher Rawlins School and Tackley School during 2026 and 2027.

From our existing resources, we continue to install solar panels, LED lighting and insulation measures to reduce energy consumption.

Religious Education (RE)

All schools in England must teach Religious Education, and in Church of England schools it is a high-priority subject.

SIAMS evaluates the quality of RE provision, and most Church of England schools in the

> *We are grateful to the many people who serve as Foundation governors and trustees across the diocese.*

The Rt Revd Kamanuri Santhosh Prasanna Rao (third right on front row) with staff and students at High Wycombe Church of England Primary School on his first visit to us since becoming Bishop of Nandyal, our link diocese in India

Diocese of Oxford are recognised for strong teaching in this area.

RE focuses on Christianity as a global faith and explores key theological ideas such as God, Incarnation and Salvation.

Pupils also study Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhi, Buddhism, Humanism and other worldviews, following locally agreed syllabi.

ODBE advisers support curriculum development by offering schemes of work, tailored advice, e-newsletters and a wide programme of training, including regular networks.

Local clergy and parishes often enrich teaching in the Christianity units.

School Governance

Effective governance underpins strong schools and enables pupils and staff to flourish. We are grateful to the many people who serve as Foundation governors and trustees across the diocese.

Strong governance depends on appointing the right people, and Foundation governors play a vital role in fostering Christian vision and values. The role is highly rewarding and makes a meaningful difference to school communities.

The new net zero carbon site for St Nicholas School in Wallingford, opening this year

At present, the diocese has a 37% vacancy rate for Foundation governors.

Anyone interested in becoming a governor can find more information on the ODBE website. To support governors, ODBE provides a comprehensive programme of online and bespoke training.

INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Interfaith engagement continues to be a central part of the work of the diocese. In line with the Church of England's Presence and Engagement strategy, interfaith advisers in each episcopal area support parishes and area teams.

Key areas of focus include High Wycombe, Slough, Reading, Banbury, Milton Keynes and Oxford.

We have enjoyed strong interfaith relationships for many years, and these have deepened further in the aftermath of the Gaza conflict and the growing pressures of marginalisation and hate crime affecting religious communities.

Participation in community vigils, civic and faith forums across the Thames Valley and encounters at iftars and friendship walks have provided significant moments of solidarity between civic and religious groups.

A particular highlight this year was our second eco schools conference in Slough. Bishop Mary opened the day by 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 offered a Muslim perspective on care for creation.

One of the most memorable elements of the day was the presentation of students' digital poster artwork responding to the climate crisis.

Supported by David Sparrow, of Art Beyond Belief, students showcased pieces that brought together creativity and urgent environmental reflection.

The conference also demonstrated the natural and unforced way in which people of different faiths live together as neighbours and friends in one of the most culturally and religiously diverse towns in the UK.

Reflecting on the event, Bishop Mary said: "It was fascinating to have the opportunity to listen to how different faiths understand reconnecting with creation, encouraging to see how much our approaches have in common, and very good to be challenged by the distinctiveness of each faith, too."

Bishop Mary reflecting on our connection to the planet at the Slough eco schools conference

PARTNERS IN WORLD MISSION

In May, visitors from all four of our link dioceses joined us at Clergy Conference

Encouraging, supporting and celebrating opportunities for Christians and churches in the Diocese of Oxford to connect with fellow Christians worldwide, and to work together as partners in the Gospel, remains central to our mission.

Some partnerships are local and parish based.

The Växjö and Kimberley and Kuruman (K and K) link groups continue to prioritise the development of parish-to-parish relationships, helping individual parishes strengthen and deepen their global connections.

At deanery level, we worked with Wallingford Deanery to create a presentation for synods. This allows synod members to share their own international links and to reflect on their place within a worldwide Christian family, drawing on personal experience as well as videos from link partners.

Shared areas of mission bring people together around the issues they care about. A joint online Season of Creation service with the Diocese of Växjö attracted more than 50 participants. More than 100 people joined, either online or in person, for the hybrid Kimberley and Kuruman Summit, which explored what it means for Christians to live as fully human.

In May, visitors from all four of our link dioceses, Växjö, Kimberley and Kuruman, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, and Nandyal, joined us at Clergy Conference and then at a day conference that filled St John's and St Stephen's, Reading.

The day brought rich discussions on justice, care for creation and Christian formation, alongside the joyful sharing of worship, music and food from a variety of traditions.

Following the conference, the Revd Olando Gayle, from western Jamaica, remarked: "We can be confident that we are not alone in our fight against climate change."

Only a few months later, his parish was among those severely affected by Hurricane Melissa. We are grateful to the many parishes who used our prayer materials and supported our appeal to raise more than £18,000 for relief and rebuilding in our link diocese, helping to ensure that our partners in mission know they are not alone.

FINANCE

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the parishes that continue to support the work of the diocese by contributing the requested parish share. Your generosity remains essential to sustaining ministry and mission across our communities.

In 2025 we collected £19.5million, an increase from £19.2million in 2024. This represented 93.9 per cent of the total request, a slight rise from 93.7 per cent the previous year.

After accounting for rebates and vacancies, contributions totalled £18.9million, up from £18.6million in 2024.

This faithful giving allows us to maintain more than 300 stipendiary, full-time-equivalent posts.

In 2025, £21.9million was spent on direct parish costs, representing 68 per cent of our total expenditure.

This includes all stipends, clergy housing, grants and the support teams who enable ministry on the ground.

Overall, the diocese spent £32.2million during the year.

We continue to make careful use of every resource available to us. By securing additional grants and using income from our investments, we ensure that as much funding as possible is directed towards the mission and ministry of the local church and towards supporting our stipendiary clergy.

Alongside managing the finances of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance and ODBE, the team also oversees our custodian company, Diocesan Trustees (Oxford) Limited.

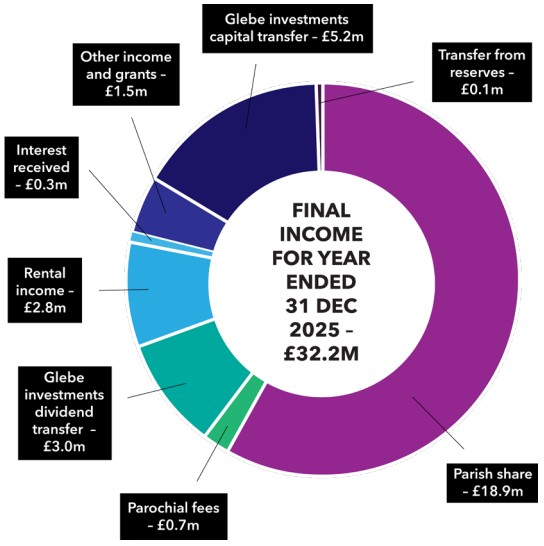
This includes processing trust movement requests and providing statements on behalf of PCCs.

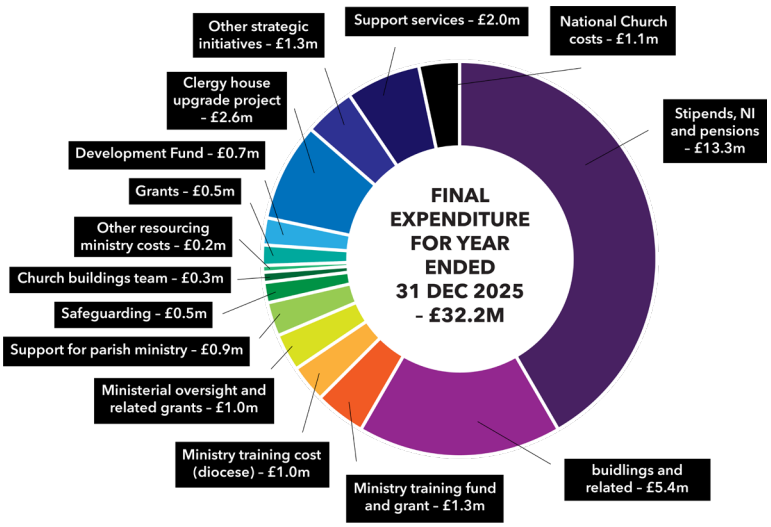
We remain committed to supporting deanery treasurers, parish finance teams and area offices.

Our annual autumn briefing continues to offer practical guidance and updates for treasurers and PCC members.

This year we also undertook a full review of the On the Money publication, aiming to make it clearer and more concise, together with a comprehensive update of the parish share leaflet and supporting documentation.

ODBF Income and Expenditure for 2025





DEVELOPMENT FUND

St Peter's in Aylesbury, where the Development Fund means they can employ a parish nurse

The Development Fund has now distributed more than £5.5million since its launch in 2019, supporting a wide range of missional initiatives across the diocese.

In 2025 alone, 45 awards were made, totalling £884,000. These enable parishes to strengthen community engagement, deepen discipleship and widen participation in creative and responsive ways.

Among the projects funded this year was Reading's first youth deanery day, held in July.

The event brought together around 130 young people for a full programme that included workshops, dodgeball, barbecue food, worship and guest speakers. It was organised by local youth leaders and grew out of shared prayer and a longing to see God's kingdom take root among young people in Reading.

The day created new connections, encouraged confidence in faith and offered a hopeful model for future deanery-wide youth ministry.

At St Peter's in Aylesbury, funding has enabled the parish to employ a parish nurse to support its mission in one of the most deprived areas of Buckinghamshire.

The role focuses on improving health and wellbeing, offering practical expressions of God's love, supporting those who often fall through the gaps in statutory provision, addressing loneliness and strengthening community partnerships.

This preventative and compassionate approach builds long-term resilience and cohesion.

Holy Trinity, Sibford received support for a significant reordering project, including the installation of a WC, servery and level access.

These improvements will help the church grow its fellowship and welfare provision and increase engagement with the local community, particularly residents of new housing nearby.

The parish plans to offer a warm, week-day welcome and develop more youth-focused worship opportunities.

Iffley Parish was awarded funding to employ a children and families worker as part of a five-year project building on the strong growth seen through Messy Church, children's groups and youth activities.

The new role will enable the parish to expand its ministry through toddler groups, outreach events, school partnerships, nurture courses, transition support for years six to seven, and regular services.

SECRETARIAT

It was a year of transition for the Secretariat, as we said farewell to several colleagues and welcomed a new Governance Officer and Director.

Throughout the year, the team continued to support parishes and the synodical structure across four main areas of work.

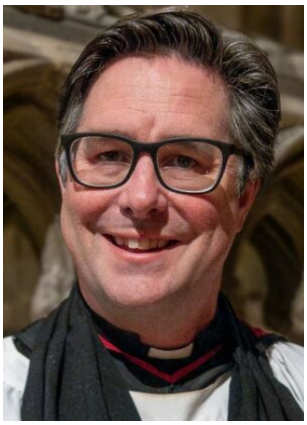
We strengthened parish governance through targeted training and guidance.

This included the induction of 33 new PCC Secretaries and workshops for nearly 100 existing Secretaries, alongside ongoing support with day-to-day governance queries.

The team also ran elections for a range of posts, including all elected positions on the Vacancy in See Committee.

Looking ahead, Deanery Synod and General Synod elections will take place in 2026.

We continued to process data gathered at annual parish meetings, manage casual vacancies across all committees (including Diocesan Synod) and support incidental appointments to parish and synod roles.



Working closely with other departments, the Secretariat oversaw the collation of electoral roll numbers and processed data from newly elected representatives and committee members.

These updates fed directly into our contact management system, ensuring accurate records of new parish postholders.

A dedicated member of the team continued to advise parishes and deaneries on data protection and record keeping, as well as maintaining our online resources.

The Church House Quarterly remained a key source of concise updates for PCCs, sharing information on legislative changes, data protection, funding opportunities and wider governance developments.

The Secretariat also administered Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council, and supported boards and committees across the diocese, including managing appointments.

Following open recruitment, Prof William Whyte, (pictured below left) was appointed Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee, and Andrew Bickley (pictured above) became Chair of the Safeguarding Panel.

The Secretariat includes the Church Buildings team, who maintain and improve churches – landmarks that stand at the heart of their communities, offering spaces for worship, social activity, cultural events and reflection. Supporting this team is a key priority.

In 2025, the Church Buildings team responded to over 2,000 applications and enquiries, ran six online 'ask us anything' sessions, completed 61 site visits, oversaw more than 50 heating system replacements and managed 27 major reorderings.

They also contributed to training for curates, churchwardens and parish project groups, and administered 25 minor repairs and improvements grants, totalling £141,000.

Finally, we supported pastoral reorganisation, suspensions, closure processes and benefice changes, working with PCCs, Archdeacons and the Church Commissioners to help parishes navigate statutory requirements and plan sustainably for the future.

HR

The HR team play a vital role in strengthening the mission and ministry of the Diocese of Oxford. They help create healthy and effective environments in which clergy, staff, volunteers and communities can flourish.

The team support strategic leadership appointments, provide expert HR guidance to parishes, enable safer recruitment, deliver targeted training and coordinate wellbeing support.

Their work underpins diocesan culture, supports leaders at every level and helps ensure safe, compassionate and well-run churches.

Strengthening Leadership Across the Diocese

During the year, the HR team supported recruitment and discernment processes for several key leadership roles, including the Archdeacon of Buckingham, Associate Archdeacon of Berkshire, Director of Mission and Ministry, Director of Secretariat, Head of Children and Youth Ministry, Head of Discipleship and Lead Diocesan Director of Ordinands.

These appointments help ensure the diocese welcomes leaders with the right skills, vocation and commitment.

The team also works to promote equality, diversity and inclusion so that diocesan staff increasingly reflect the communities they serve.

Practical HR Support to Parishes

Parishes benefited from a range of practical assistance, including:

- Updated guidance in the Parish HR Toolkit, reflecting changes in the Employment Rights Act 2025.
- Advice on vacancies, disputes, safer recruitment and people management.
- Support for Development Fund bids involving staffing or volunteer roles.

This work promotes safe, inclusive and well-managed parish environments and enables churches to serve their communities more effectively.

Enhancing Safer Recruitment

The HR team led key aspects of the diocesan response to a data breach involving the third-party umbrella DBS provider which led to the procurement of a new, industry-leading service.

This ensures that safer recruitment processes remain robust for employees and volunteers at both diocesan and parish levels, reaffirming our commitment to safeguarding.

Building Confidence in People Management

The team delivered the first Hiring and Managing Staff within our Churches workshop for clergy and parish representatives.

This training equipped participants with practical skills for managing staff and volunteers, helping parishes build confidence in local people management.

Due to strong demand, the workshop will run again in 2026.

Supporting Clergy and Staff Wellbeing

The HR team manage relationships with occupational health and wellbeing providers, ensuring access to specialist support.

A new health assessment process was introduced in 2025 for clergy moving into or within the diocese, and for those over 70 continuing in ministry.

This ensures that all of our clergy are able to receive timely and appropriate support as they serve their schools, their parishes and their communities.

PROPERTY

Over the past year, our focus has been clear: to provide clergy and parishes with a property service that is easier to navigate, more responsive, and genuinely supportive of local ministry.

Much of this work has taken place behind the scenes, but its impact has been felt directly in clergy homes and parish communities throughout the diocese.

We have continued to strengthen the way we support clergy living in diocesan housing. Repairs are now handled more consistently, with improved communication ensuring clergy and their families feel informed and supported throughout the process.

Moves have also run more smoothly, with properties prepared on time and to a higher standard, reducing stress at a significant moment of transition for clergy and parishes.

A major area of progress has been the improvement of energy performance across our housing portfolio.

This year, we completed targeted upgrades to 50 clergy houses, including improved insulation, heating system enhancements and better glazing.

These measures are already helping to reduce energy consumption and running costs for occupants, while contributing to the diocese's wider environmental commitments.

Alongside these upgrades, we delivered essential refurbishment and lifecycle projects designed to extend the lifespan of our buildings and ensure clergy homes remain safe, warm and well cared for.

This year also saw the introduction of revised housing policies, written with clarity and accessibility in mind.

These updates provide a more transparent set of expectations – for clergy, for parishes and for us – and help everyone understand how decisions are made.

Early feedback has been positive, particularly regarding the improved readability and the consistency these policies bring across the diocese.

The past year has seen big improvements to energy performance across our housing portfolio

COMMUNICATIONS

This year's Come and See design was created by Emma Thompson, a member of our team

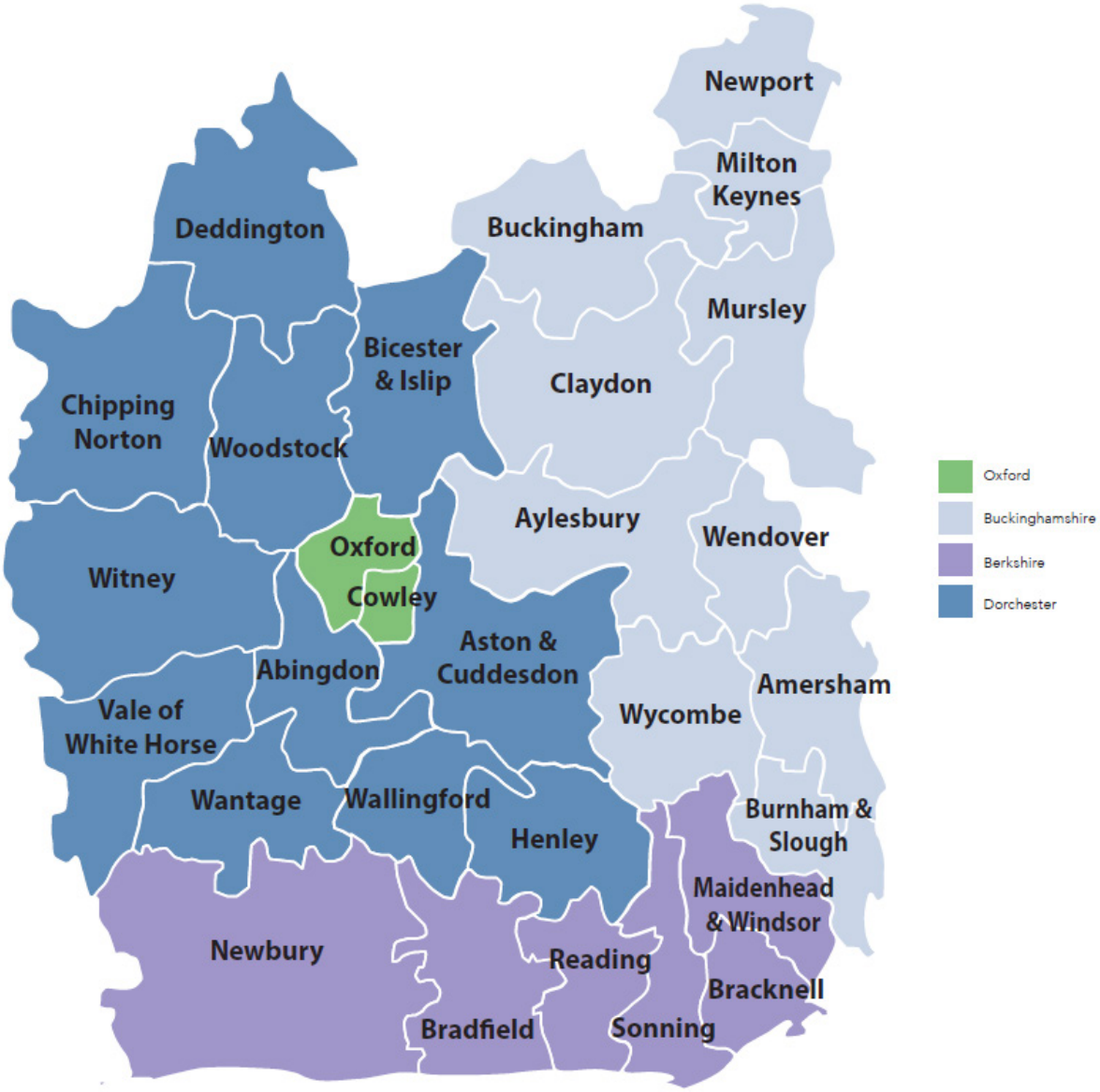
The Communications team at the diocese is here to support our parishes, clergy and schools. During this year, our activity included:

- Managing incidents, crises and emergencies that crop up, in and out of hours. This year this involved supporting clergy when traumatic incidents affect a parish, such as the deaths of three firefighters in Bicester. We also support and advise on high-profile weddings and funerals, ensuring the wishes of the family are protected by us liaising with the media and other agencies, and representing their interests.
- The diocese's strategic priority of children and young people has led us to introduce TikTok to our social media channels, in order to move into a space more associated with a younger generation.
- In keeping with the need to be wise stewards of the funds entrusted to us by parishes, this year we have brought design in house, enabling us to move to a consistent house style, reduce costs previously spent with commercial suppliers and enable faster turnaround.
- A highlight of this year has been the production of Bishop Steven's last Come and See, with its focus on the Eucharist, together with our colleagues in Mission and Ministry. This year's Come and See design was produced by a member of our team.
- Finally it has been a privilege and honour for the team to be so centrally involved with the Vacancy in See Committee, creating, managing and evaluating the consultation survey; creating and designing the Statement of Needs; and ensuring our work to find our next Diocesan Bishop was shared widely with the media, partner organisations, the communities we serve and our schools and parishes.

COMMITTEE LIST

Committee/Company	Chair	Secretary
Archdeaconry, Mission and Pastoral Committee	Archdeacon	Claire Green
Agenda Sub-Committee	Bishop of Oxford	Diocesan Secretary
Appointments Committee	Bishop of Oxford	Diocesan Secretary
Audit	Simon Richards	Andrew Green
Bishop's Council	Bishop of Oxford and Sir Hector Sants	Diocesan Secretary
Board of Patronage	Revd Dan Heyward	Nigel Edward-Few
Buildings	Revd Tim Yates	Sophie Orme
Closed Churches (CCC)	The Ven Stephen Pullin	Liz Kitch
Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)	Revd Canon William Whyte	Liz Kitch
Development Fund Panel	John Sykes	Fiona McGrady
DT(O)L	Bishop of Oxford	Diocesan Secretary
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)	Bishop of Buckingham	Charnelle Stylianides
Finance	Sir Hector Sants	Andrew Green
Formation for Ministry Oversight Board	Bishop of Dorchester	Revd Dr Andy Angel
Glebe	Revd Andrew Bond	Sophie Orme
HR Panel	Dr Gillian Hamnett	Charnelle Stylianides
Interfaith (ODCIR)	The Ven Jonathan Chaffey	Abigail Corfield
Investment	Matthew Dodds	Andrew Green
ODBE	Dr Felix Leach	Tony Wilson
ODCD	Nigel Edward-Few	Fiona McNally
Partnership in World Mission (PiWM)	Bishop of Reading	Bishop Henry Scriven
Resourcing Hub Board (RHB)	The Ven David Tyler	Liza Thompson
Safeguarding Panel	Andrew Bickley	Dr Louise Whitehead
Vacancy in See Committee	Revd Canon Geoff Bayliss	Diocesan Secretary

THE AREA WE SERVE



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

There are 808 churches in 29 deaneries serving a population of 2.5m people and 283 Church of England schools serving around 60,000 pupils.

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

DIOCESE *of* OXFORD

oxford.anglican.org