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Overview

Canterbury is the oldest diocese in the Church of England. It crosses Kent, from Maidstone to Thanet, the Isle of Sheppey to Romney Marsh. The coastline, rural areas, market towns, and urban centres each offer their own challenges and opportunities for mission. We are a vibrant community with a rich history. Our location and excellent transport links make our diocese an appealing place to live and work.

We have three archdeaconries: Canterbury, Ashford, and Maidstone. These are divided into 16 deaneries, 97 benefices and 196 parishes with 303 churches. Our diocese also manages 105 church schools, offering education and spiritual and moral guidance to more than 26,200 children and young people.

Introduction

The Bishop of Dover writes

Within the last year, I have regularly been dwelling in scripture using the story of Jesus in the boat asleep on a cushion while a storm is brewing. This has led me consciously, every time I am in a church building, to look up.

There I see the architectural design of a boat, and I am drawn to envisage our Lord asleep, making himself comfortable with the cushion – Mark’s gospel gives us this image (4:35–41). Not far away from him, in another part of the boat, the disciples are in a state of fear. They are panicking. They believe a disaster is about to enfold them and they cry out: *“Jesus, wake up man! How can you be sleeping? Can you not feel the rage of the wind, the damage that is being done! We are frightened, afraid, and all you can do is sleep! Wake up!”*

Jesus awakes, and he first calms the storm, *“Silence! Be still!”* Three simple words effecting change. Then he addresses the behaviour of the disciples, *“Why are you afraid, where is your faith?”* There is something to be said about ‘being still, being silent’. The silence allows us time to think, to see things in perspective, to remember who we are, who has called us and who is always present with us. It is all too easy to join in with the crowd and be carried along within the echo chamber of whatever is being shouted.

The truth is, we cannot legislate for all the storms of life, but it is within our powers to decide how we will respond. As the children of God here in the Diocese of Canterbury, may we always remember that the risen Christ is present with us. It may feel at times like there are storms along the way, but we are called to keep faithful and know God’s presence with us and treasure the exciting waters of mission and growth.

+Rose

Bishop Rose

Bishop of Dover and Bishop in Canterbury

The Diocesan Secretary writes

As I meet more and more of the people who attend church across the Diocese, it is clear there is much to celebrate. **I also take encouragement from the number of people wanting to know what more we can achieve together and how we can meet the challenges and opportunities that we face to bring more people to faith.**

As we announced at Synod, we are aiming to use every parish’s Mission Action Planning to inform diocesan strategy more clearly, helping us achieve our **Three Bold Outcomes** together.

No parish is alone in their planning and the team here at Diocesan House is always here to help. Our **Generous Giving team** has already helped many parishes explore their financial situation and what steps they can best take. The **Mission and Ministry team** can help in a variety of ways to support current parish missions or help explore areas that a parish may not yet be aware of. The **Children and Young People's framework**, along with the **Board of Education**, support parishes' partnerships with their local schools as well as wider work with young people and families. The Vocations team can help in enabling people to discern how they can best serve the parish, God, and the local community. There is also the **DAC team**, the **Property team**, and your Archdeacon's office, who can also help support each parish we discern together where God may be taking us next.

Iain Blythe

Diocesan Secretary

Our Vision and Bold Outcomes

Our mission – why we exist ‘Changed Lives → Changing Lives’

At the heart of all we do is a vision of transformation for ourselves and our communities: no one can encounter God and remain unchanged. We want to increasingly become a Christian community transformed through encounter with Christ, growing and overflowing to transform and bless the families, homes and communities we serve: Changed Lives, Changing Lives.

Our vision – what the future will look like

By God’s grace we want to be a people who are...

- **confident** and creative disciples of Jesus Christ,
- rooted in scripture and drenched in **prayer**,
- living gratefully, giving **generously**, caring for creation and sharing the gospel,
- **growing** in number and expectations – of God and ourselves,
- by **justice** and love, open to the Spirit and ready for adventure.

Three Bold Outcomes

Our diocese has been on a journey of listening and discerning to arrive at our vision and strategy, which is distilled into Three Bold Outcomes for 2030:

- Double the number of children and young disciples.
- Two hundred new Christian communities.
- Every parish, benefice and deanery showing signs of revitalisation.

Our strategy – how will we get there?

Our strategy is ‘To enable the local church to share in God’s Mission’.

We use the phrase “Therefore, we will...” as a recognition that words without actions are empty. It is a commitment to taking real steps now to make our vision a reality soon. The actions will change and develop overtime and as we consider our vision and explore together what actions we commit to take at diocese, deanery and parish level.

Tools and resources

Some projects require major investment and are coordinated at diocesan level. This includes the diocesan-wide recruitment of youth ministers, helping to identify and equip our resourcing churches, piloting Flourish partnerships between schools and churches, enabling Ignite phase 2, and the research into and launch of focal ministers. We also support local mission through Leading your Church into Growth courses, encouraging both parish mission action planning and deanery planning, training for ministers in youth ministry, growing young leaders, resourcing youth ministry and the ongoing development of a rural strategy.

Children and Young People

Vision for Children, Young People and Education

We imagine and pray for a hope-filled future for all; both experiencing fullness of life in church schools which are living out a theologically rooted Christian vision, and children and young people growing in faith and discipleship which inspires them to contribute confidently to the Kingdom of God.

We champion:

- An outward-looking church striving to be younger and more diverse
- Mutuality, belonging and justice: no exception, no exclusion
- Shepherding God's flock with skill, compassion and integrity of heart
- People and schools being deeply rooted in the life of their community
- A bold commitment to education rooted in a Christian vision and context.

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE)

The DBE is a statutory committee of the Diocesan Board of Finance and serves 105 Church of England (CE) schools – 26,200 pupils. We hold an important system leadership role aspiring to build a resilient school system and a collaborative, family ethos in an often fragmented landscape, striving for excellence in church schools and enabling them to share light with their communities as beacons of Christian values. We support CE schools to live out a Christian vision enabling all children and adults to flourish:

- which is generous and enriching;
- that nurtures a culture of deep reflection and compassion for God's world
- encourages spiritual development
- provides a rich experience and appreciation of the Christian faith.

Officers support schools operationally and pastorally through networks, conferences and training, leadership development programmes and governance advice, school improvement and estates support, along with materials, policy and guidance on issues relating to Christian character and their Anglican foundation.

New Christian Communities

Ignite

Ignite is a parish-based church initiative reaching marginalised and socially deprived communities. Founded in Cliftonville, Margate, it expanded with Strategic Development

Funding and now benefits from Benefact Trust support. Hubs are in Margate, Herne Bay, Ashford, Sittingbourne, Maidstone, Aylesham and Canterbury.

Resourcing Churches & Church Planting

The creation of ‘Resourcing Churches’ is part of the strategy to plant and revitalise churches. These hubs in our urban centres will be a source of expertise and encouragement to churches around them. They will develop lay and ordained leaders who will continue to work locally as they join or plant churches with potential to grow. We currently have resourcing churches in Margate and Maidstone, with the next one expected to be in Ashford. Fresh expressions of Church and New Christian Communities (FxC/NCC) have played a significant role in the most desirable growth among children and young people over the last year. In other words, children and families respond to appropriate provision for them.

However, we can also see that, while some FxC/NCC or new services are being launched, others seem to be closing year on year, so the growth should be regarded as volatile. Developing the capacity to offer new and appropriate services will need to be part of our ongoing strategy.

Revitalisation: Growing the Church

Our Three Bold Outcomes require or imply growth in three dimensions: numbers of worshipping disciples, depth of discipleship, and missional vitality in local communities.

Post-pandemic, we faced a net decline in attendance. In 2024, the diocese declined by a modest 1% (figures include a margin of error). However, attendance among children and young people rose by 13.6%. We got younger! Notably, churches that maintained or increased their number of services experienced growth.

Leading your Church into Growth (LYCIG) conferences have proven popular since their launch in the diocese in 2024. There is evidence that participation in LYCIG supports growth across the three dimensions.

We are exploring focal ministry; focusing on one person leading one church in multi-church contexts. Focal ministers act as the main contact for their local church and community, fostering growth and revitalising congregations, whether they are lay or ordained.

Growing Ministry

Our Clergy and Lay Ministers are supported by the diocese which provides opportunities for applying good practice in recognising, supporting and equipping their ministry. Networking and learning ministry together days for lay ministers during 2024 were

attended by over 100 people. In October 2024, all licensed clergy were invited by Bishop Rose to a residential retreat exploring themes around prayer. This was the first time for many years that ordained ministers have gathered together in this way.

Lay Ministry

Our ministry to older people currently has 23 Anna Chaplains who are supported by 22 Anna Friends. A further two Anna Chaplains are awaiting commissioning.

We have 120 active Readers which includes 11 in training with St Augustine's College and three ordinands.

Revitalisation: Growing Vocations

The responsibility for noticing and naming God's call in someone's life primarily lies with leaders in the local church as they see that person's journey in faith first-hand.

Diocesan staff and officers support local lay and ordained leaders in that task, linking to regional and national processes for discernment and training. We have a close working relationship with St Augustine's College and the Diocese of Rochester and work together to provide training for readers, ordinands, curates and new incumbents.

In 2024 there were six candidates ordained to the distinctive diaconate. These people have stayed in the communities where their call was discerned and are establishing themselves as leaders in mission. They encourage the congregation to go out to where people are, rather than expecting people to come in.

2024 was the first-time candidates over 65 were ordained through 'The Dover Pathway'. This is an accelerated programme of discernment and training for people over 65 who already hold significant positions of leadership within their church. Many of these candidates are Readers who have responded to the need for eucharistic ministers working in a 'focal minister' or 'assistant priest' role and all are local self-supporting ordained ministers.

Environmental and Net Zero Goals

As stewards of God’s creation, we are committed to environmental responsibility and achieving net zero carbon emissions. Recognising the urgency of the climate crisis, we strive to model sustainable practice in all areas of diocesan life and to provide leadership both locally and globally. In alignment with the Church of England’s Net Zero 2030 target, we are actively working towards achieving the Silver Eco Diocese Award. This reflects our growing integration of environmental values across worship, buildings, land, community engagement, and personal lifestyle.

Our current and planned initiatives include:

- Transitioning diocesan buildings and churches to renewable or green energy sources;
- Encouraging biodiversity and sustainable land management across church land;
- Supporting congregations and communities in adopting environmentally conscious practices.

We also seek to collaborate with national and local partners, sharing knowledge, amplifying good practice, and inspiring collective action within and beyond the Church. We believe that care for creation is not a standalone concern, but one that deepens and unifies the Church’s entire mission

Safeguarding – everyone’s responsibility

Churches should be places where everyone can feel safe and be empowered to speak out, if not. We may never be perfect, but in our diocese, we work together to make our churches safer and to minimise the risks of harm and abuse.

Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. It is at the heart of everything we do. The Safeguarding Team comprises two Diocesan Safeguarding Officers and also includes a full-time Administrator and part-time Trainer.

The DSOs are responsible for professional leadership on and management of safeguarding matters. This includes the implementation of the Church of England National Safeguarding Standards (NSS) throughout our diocese which are:

- Culture, Leadership and Capacity
- Prevention
- Recognising, Assessing and Managing Risk
- Victims and Survivors
- Learning, Supervision and Support

The NSS encompass all the work the Safeguarding Team undertakes from case referral and management to DBS checks, safeguarding training at all levels and other advice regarding the Safeguarding Code of Practice and House of Bishops or Church of England safeguarding guidance.

In 2024 the Church of England launched its programme of safeguarding audits with INEQE for all dioceses and cathedrals. Our audit is scheduled for November 2026 and will be in person for up to five days with auditors on site. A working group has been convened to ensure our diocese is fully prepared for the audit and the preliminary submissions and evidence which need to be made from July 2026.

Social Justice Network

Our work is at the heart of the Diocesan vision that we are ‘changed lives, changing lives’, as we help to transform our communities through social action, working alongside the poor and homeless, prison leavers, asylum seekers, victims of slavery, rural communities, and community initiatives of various kinds.

Since our official launch in June 2024, we are in a period of considerable growth, with major grants received, and stories of lives transformed. We are exploring new pathways with parishes and schools to expand our reach and create new ventures in East Kent.

Our projects range from local, to national and international. The charity delivers its work through innovative partnerships creating a framework for others to respond to social challenges. We offer advice and guidance to individuals, communities, and parishes, who are considering how they can better serve the socially and financially deprived.

Please follow our work on our website: thesocialjusticenetwork.org

Governance and Management

Senior Staff, Synods and Frameworks

The Archdeacons of Canterbury, Maidstone, and Ashford oversee five to six deaneries each, working closely with the Bishop of Dover. The Archdeacon of Canterbury also serves as a Residentiary Canon of Canterbury Cathedral. Together with Area Deans and Lay Chairs, they support and guide parish and community ministries across the diocese. In our medium-sized diocese with one bishop, Archdeacons manage tasks typically handled by suffragan bishops elsewhere, such as appointments and the developing and implementation of diocesan strategy.

The Archbishop's Council

The Archbishop's Council is the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod. It plans the business of the Synod, advises it, and transacts its business when not in session. The Archbishop's Council advises the Bishop of Dover, appoints members to various committees and formulates, discusses and co-ordinates policies relating to the life and work of our diocese.

Diocesan Frameworks

The detailed work of the Archbishop's Council in overseeing Mission and Ministry and Children and Young People is delegated to frameworks. These support and oversee the work of diocesan staff and officers by drawing on the expertise of members of Archbishop's Council and practitioners from around our diocese to ensure dynamic governance and exemplary stewardship in all aspects of our work and ministry.

Finances

We share a similar financial footprint to most other dioceses in the country. Parish Share revenue comprises 80% of total revenue just as clergy stipends and staff salaries make up 80% of total costs.

The Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) is working hard to diversify future sources of revenue away from Parish Share, thus easing the pressure on PCCs. 2024 Year End Figures Provisional figures for 2024 show an unrestricted deficit of £751k. Nationally deficits of dioceses are estimated to have increased to £60m. Parish Share income was £1.2m below what was a balanced budget between income and costs, contributing significantly to financial challenges. As at year end, 85% of the £7.3m in Parish Share requested had been paid, compared to 90% paid in 2022 and 2023.

Taking into account LinC (Lower Income Communities) Funding and other external funding totalling £900k, other income totalled £1.8m, largely thanks to the work the Property Team have done to increase rental income. Total year-end income is expected to reach £8.9m. Expenditure at £9.7m was £124k above budget. This was largely due to

an unavoidable overspend in urgent catch up on property repairs of £460k. Support services at £1.8m showed an overspend on budget of £2k primarily as prices on all IT contracts rose higher than planned, offset by savings in other areas. Other key cost lines came in on plan or better than plan, comprising primarily Children & Young People (£418k) and Social Justice Network (£108k).

Meeting the Financial Challenge

The Generous Giving team supports parishes to encourage generosity within their congregations and local communities. This support helps raise essential funds that enable the parishes' work, life, and mission, ultimately contributing to the growth of the church.

To support parishes, the team provides guidance on digital giving, giving campaigns, regular giving, gifts in wills, Gift Aid, and signposting for grant applications. Additionally, they help churches extend their opening hours beyond regular worship times to strengthen community engagement, create fundraising materials, and offer to preach on generosity.

With Synod's support, efforts are underway to explore financial opportunities in two areas: internal investments to lessen dependence on Parish Share and ease PCCs' burdens, and initiatives supported by the National Church.

To conclude:

- The DBF will ensure that we are at the forefront for opportunities offered by the National Church.
- We need to strengthen trust between the DBF and the wider diocese. This has already begun through additional interaction between the finance team and the parish/ deanery treasurers.
- We need to repurpose the DBF more effectively to support other areas of the diocese. This will involve meeting the demands of diversification in revenues and the ongoing tight management of costs as well as managing all the risks we face. That review is well underway.
- We must maximise the financial opportunities we have identified, and we must be proactive in seeking grants and other funding.
- We have four stages of improving the financial position: To achieve a balanced budget by 2030; to use the assets held by the diocese better; to put the case for significant support from the National Church Institutions, and; to submit a diocesan-wide funding request to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board ("SMMIB") to grow the church in our part of Kent.