

# Diocese of Canterbury

## Strategy Overview – Summary

The Diocese of Canterbury set **Three Bold Outcomes** aimed at revitalizing its communities and enhancing engagement by 2030.

### The Three Bold Outcomes:

- **Double the Number of Children and Young Disciples:** The diocese aims to significantly increase the involvement of children and young people in church activities. This initiative is part of a broader goal to grow the next generation of believers and ensure that the church remains relevant and engaging for younger audiences.
- **Every Parish, Benefice, and Deanery Showing Signs of Revitalization:** This outcome focuses on ensuring that all areas within the diocese demonstrate growth and renewal. The diocese will look for signs of new life and faith, which may include numerical growth, community engagement, and the development of new worshipping communities.
- **200 New Christian Communities:** The diocese encourages the establishment of new worshipping communities that meet the needs of local populations. This could involve innovative approaches to worship, such as gatherings in homes, cafes, or schools, rather than traditional church settings.

These outcomes reflect the Diocese of Canterbury's commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive church community that actively engages with its members and the wider society. The focus on revitalization and youth involvement is seen as essential for the future growth and sustainability of the church.

This document sets out the Diocesan Strategy as well as bringing together the aims and objectives behind the application to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (“SMMIB”) for a ten-year partnership and funding.

The aim is to provide missional and financial growth across the diocese.

Our strategy is ‘To enable the local church to share in God’s Mission’. This shifts the focus of planning and support closer to the local church, helping to give parishes the tools and encouragement to lead mission in their communities.

In the autumn of 2025, we launched **Three Things**, a listening and learning exercise to encourage each parish to explore and share their three priorities for mission. This was backed by an intensive deanery-led review of the health of parishes and church communities within this diocese. Together these are part of a three-way conversation between Parish, Deanery and Diocesan Board of Finance that enables all of us to focus and develop our common aims and objectives. This mission action planning enables

meaningful conversations and has helped identify where resources are needed and where there are shared priorities.

Our Diocese is diverse. There are variances in geography, the age, location and health of our church buildings, social culture, economic wealth, ethnicity and church tradition. Rural and coastal communities present their own challenges and opportunities, and our aim must be to grow the church with compassion and do so and creatively.

Our plans sit firmly at the local level in enabling sustainable and growing parishes serving God in their communities and have discerned four strategic themes to underpin our vision:

- Children and Young People
- Attendance revitalisation
- Leadership
- Finance

## **The Diocese of Canterbury**

The Diocese of Canterbury, founded in 597 by St. Augustine, is the oldest diocese in England and serves as a central part of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion.

The diocese has played a crucial role in the development of Christianity in England and continues to be a focal point for the Anglican Communion worldwide.

Stretching from Maidstone to Thanet, the Isle of Sheppey to the Romney Marsh, Canterbury has 350 miles of coastline with historic ports and seaside resorts, alongside rural communities, market towns and commuter-belt urban developments. Affluent areas often sit alongside pockets of major deprivation, offering an exciting and challenging mission context. The Diocese serves a population of about 1 million people.

The diocesan bishop is the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is also the Metropolitan of the Southern Province, Primate of All England and the spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion. The current Archbishop, Dame Sarah Mullally, will be formally installed in March 2026, making her the first woman to hold this position. The diocese also has a suffragan bishop, the Bishop of Dover, who assists in the administration and pastoral care of the diocese. Two further suffragans have nominal sees in the diocese — the bishops of Ebbsfleet and Richborough, who are provincial episcopal visitors with a wider focus than the diocese.

Three Archdeacons (Ashford, Canterbury and Maidstone) complete the senior clerical leadership within the diocese.

The Diocese is split into three archdeaconries. The Archdeacons and appointed Area Deans work together with the Bishop of Dover to assist the running of the parishes within our diocese.

Canterbury Diocese comprises 196 parishes organised in 98 legal benefices.

There are 16 deaneries within the diocese. Each deanery has its own Deanery Synod with membership of all clergy licensed to parishes in the deanery, plus elected lay members from each parish. Each deanery is overseen by at least one Area Dean (ordained) and one Lay Chair, who hold the post for a fixed term.

The Diocese of Canterbury has 105 Church of England schools that it supports and works alongside. A high-quality Religious Education (RE) curriculum is essential to meet the statutory requirement for all maintained schools to teach a broad and balanced curriculum. The aim is that church schools should be flagships of excellent practice for RE teaching.

The Strategy for the Church School System in the Diocese of Canterbury states a clear ambition to maintain a cohesive, interdependent family of diocesan church schools, dedicated to transforming the lives of children and young people. The Board of Education seeks to be responsive to local contexts and attentive to the political landscape for education, both regionally and nationally, whilst holding a neutral position in relation to whether schools operate within the maintained sector or convert to academy status.

The Diocese has an autonomous charity, the Social Justice Network which works in communities to alleviate issues of poverty, marginalisation, and vulnerability, especially the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, and those leaving prison into homelessness. Projects range from local, to national and international. Work is delivered through innovative partnerships creating a framework for others to respond to social challenges.

The Diocese is an historic and vital part of the Church of England, with a rich heritage and a commitment to serving its communities through faith and action.

## **Vision and Strategy**

### ***Our Mission***

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 increasingly to become a Christian community transformed through encounter with Christ, growing and overflowing to transform and bless the families, homes and communities we serve

For a number of years, we have summarised this in our central mission statement

**Changed Lives → Changing Lives.**

### ***Our Vision***

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,
- motivated by justice and love, open to the Spirit and ready for adventure.

### ***Our 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 3 bold outcomes for 2030:

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

### ***Our strategy***

Our strategy is '**To enable the local church to share in God's Mission**' and our strategic priority is, therefore, the strengthening of the church at local level – at the point where ministry is delivered and where lives may be changed.

Our strategic commitment is, therefore, to develop tools and resources to promote and enable growth in mission and ministry at the local level. These resources will be targeted and focussed under four thematic headings:

- Children and Young People;
- Leadership;
- Arresting Attendance Decline; and

- Finance.

While some projects require major investment and are coordinated at diocesan level (including resourcing churches, diocese-wide recruitment of youth ministers, Flourish and Ignite) we are committed to leaving no-one behind.

## **The way forward**

We have consulted widely on our strategic priorities and have already invested in initiatives designed to promote growth. Growth is already being seen in areas where work with families with children is prioritised. There has been a remarkable take-up in Leading Your Church into Growth courses. Parishes and benefices have been through an exercise in prioritisation and Mission Action Planning under the title ‘Three Things’. Our diocese contains a number of deprived coastal communities and investment through Ignite and the work of the Social Justice Network aims to strengthen mission and ministry in these communities. There are also extensive rural communities in East Kent, and a new Rural Strategy is now in place.

Our mission strategy is rooted in Matthew 28:19-20:

“<sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

## **Current Strategy**

With funding support from the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) we have invested in **Resourcing Churches** in Margate and Maidstone. Each is showing good growth especially amongst children and young people. They are also developing future leaders to support revitalisation elsewhere across the diocese. They are expected to support nearby parishes.

The investment for Maidstone included an **Associate Minister** to help support the significant growth targets. The parish identified a higher priority need for a part-time Operations Manager role to run the complex site on a day-to-day basis to release the minister to focus on ministry and growth.

A third **Resourcing Church** was considered for Ashford which accounts for ten percent of the total diocesan population but with attendance per capita well below the diocesan average. The only suitable church building would have required sizable capital investment beyond the range of potential available funding. A wider review of the Ashford Town parish is underway.

The Canterbury Diocesan Board of Finance’s first funding request to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (“SMMIB”) was approved in April 2023. This

included approximately £0.5m to fund seven youth ministers across the diocese. To date, five of the proposed seven youth ministers are in post.

Ignite has been a successful model for establishing new Christian communities in areas of deprivation, originally developed in St. Paul's, Cliftonville, Margate. Earlier funding enabled us to establish self-sustaining plants in Maidstone, Ashford and two in Herne Bay. Over the last two years we have planted additional Ignites in Aylesham and Canterbury with funding support from Benefact Trust.