

Strategic Mission and Ministry Board announcement of 'substantial grant' to Blackburn Diocese

Message from Bishop Philip

June 13, 2024

In the past few years in the Diocese of Blackburn we have set a bold path for ourselves.

We believe with all our hearts that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to change lives and transform communities. And rooted in that shared conviction, we believe that we can grow the church in Lancashire in depth and in number.

That is why we are starting new congregations and planting churches. That is why we are taking steps to renew parish life. That is why we are committed to maintaining stipendiary clergy numbers. We do this because we long for people across our county to find life in relationship with Jesus.

It is a bold strategy. But I have got some very good news to share with you. Just recently the Strategic Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of England has decided to invest in our Diocesan strategy with a very substantial grant.

This investment will make a massive difference to our common life and is to fund a set of specific projects that we have developed together. It will enable us, for example, to expand our ministry to the young, to strengthen church life in urban areas, to offer enhanced support to clergy and to sustain pioneering programmes of work such as M:Power and the Parish Renewal Programme.

But it comes also with a challenge. The church nationally has invested in a strategy that we have agreed together as a Diocesan family. Now we need to deliver on it.

So how will we do that? First of all, and very importantly, not by killing ourselves with overwork. Exhausted parishes, exploited lay leaders, burnt out clergy and crazed activism do not play part in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our call is to joyful Christian living.

What will we do, though, is to be purposeful. And in particular we will deliver what we have agreed with the Strategic Mission and Ministry Board by focussing on five things.

First, prayer. Nothing will come to anything without heartfelt and disciplined prayer, especially prayer for growth. That is why we are going to have a Year of Prayer for Growth and Renewal in 2025 as we prepare for our centenary. More details of this will be available soon.

Second, evangelism. There is no greater possible act of love than to invite another person into relationship with Jesus Christ. Our diocese has grown in number for three consecutive years, supported by new local congregations, renewed parishes and faithful pastoral ministry across the county. Intentional evangelism, supported by prayer, is growing our churches and that can continue.

Third, generosity. God has been generous with us, so it is a joyful thing to be generous in return. As part of our agreement with the national church, we have set ambitious goals for growth in income. If more and more people respond to God's generosity with their own giving, I think we can beat even those targets. The series of workshop on Joyful Generous Stewards taking place this Autumn can support parishes in improving their giving.

Fourth, vocations. A commitment to maintaining clergy numbers will come to nothing if we cannot help men and women to discern a vocation to be priests, deacons and lay leaders. Is there anyone in your congregation whom God is calling? If the answer is yes, please get in touch with our Director of Ministry, Anne Beverley.

Fifth, prayer. We begin and end with prayer because prayer changes things, prayer moves the tectonic plates, prayer opens us up to the glory of God. If we pray, all things are possible.

Today then celebrate the good news of a major grant. But above all this is time to dedicate ourselves afresh to living the Gospel joyfully in the parishes, schools and chaplaincies of our Diocese. For it is the love of Christ that compels us.

Rt Rev. Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn