

More than a hundred new churches are to be created in a £27 million drive by the Church of England to revive the Christian faith in coastal areas, market towns and outer urban housing estates, it was announced today.

New Christian communities in areas including the Kent coast, housing estates in Plymouth and market towns in Cambridgeshire are to be set up by the Church of England as part of its Renewal and Reform programme.

The plans have been backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby as a ‘wonderful example’ of how churches are seeking to be faithful to God and to serve their communities.

He said: “The Church of England exists to share the good news of Jesus through our words and our actions. Across the country, churches are bursting with life – which in part is shown through how they love and serve their communities. I’m especially pleased about these grants because they demonstrate our commitment to following Jesus to the places of greatest need in our society.

“These projects are wonderful examples of how churches are seeking to be faithful to God – and faithful to their communities in love and mission. Through their innovation, they signal a growing determination in the Church to share the good news of Jesus Christ in ways that make sense for those in our most deprived communities.”

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu said: “I am overwhelmed with joy that the Church of England is investing significant resources, both financial and people, which will assist churches to reach out to local communities across England with the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ for everyone.

"I pray for growth and new life for the Church - for the good of the whole country."

John Spence, chair of the Church of England’s Strategic Investment Board, which approved funding for the work by the dioceses, said: “These grants are funding bold ambitious initiatives. Their scale and breadth show that the Church is feeling confident about its future.”

In Canterbury Diocese, a pioneering café-style church called ‘Ignite’ in Margate, Kent, is to be used as a blueprint for nine new worshipping communities in the coastal towns of Herne Bay, Sheerness on the Isle of Sheppey and St Peter Port in Guernsey as well as Sittingbourne, Maidstone and Ashford.

The Ignite project was founded at St Paul’s Church in Margate 10 years ago, aiming to reach marginalised and deprived communities in the town.

The scheme has been announced alongside a £1.69 million grant to create three new churches for people living in outer urban estates in Plymouth. It is hoped that the new churches will provide support and inspiration for up to nine new churches in and around the city.

In Ely Diocese, the Church of England is to fund a project promoting church growth, focussing on the market towns of Wisbech, March, Chatteris, Littleport, Ramsey, Huntingdon and Downham Market.

In Swindon, a former railway works building is to be transformed into a church, aimed primarily at people aged under 40 years old who have no current connection with a church. Bristol Diocese anticipates the new church will act as a catalyst for training clergy and supporting mission in both new and established churches across the area.

A grant has also been made to Worcester Diocese to fund staff and a refit of St Thomas and St Luke's Church in Dudley, and to boost work already under way at All Saints Church in Worcester. In Southwell and Nottingham Diocese, existing churches will be given further support in Nottingham, Retford and Mansfield in Nottinghamshire which in turn will help to support 75 new worshipping communities.

In Leicester Diocese a £5.3 million grant has been awarded to support six existing larger churches or teams, in developing up to 50 new churches, or worshipping communities, in the area. In Newcastle, a new church will be created in the city centre that will provide support to churches throughout the area.

A grant of £2.14 million has been awarded to Manchester Diocese to create 16 new small churches over six years, and to work with children in Bolton, especially at the points of transition from pre-school to primary school and from primary to secondary school. In Peterborough Diocese a £1.1 million grant will be used to invest in ministry with children and young people.

The grants from the Church of England's Strategic Development Fund have been awarded to the dioceses as part of the Renewal and Reform programme aimed at creating a growing church in all places for all people.

Here is the list of the 10 dioceses to receive funding:

Bristol

Pattern Church – A catalyst for mission in Swindon

For the development of a new church in Swindon, based in the Pattern Store, a former GWR railway works building next to the Designer Outlet commercial centre. The church will be known as 'Pattern Church' and will be launched in December 2018 with a vision to "Love Jesus, Build family and Serve Swindon".

Rt Revd Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon, said: "The Pattern Church is set to become the home base for providing fresh energy, people and approaches which will resource other churches across the town and contribute to social transformation.

"This is an inspiring and challenging vision, both for Swindon and for the Diocese of Bristol. It is a venture of considerable faith and reflects what Jesus Christ has laid on many of our hearts for this very special town."

(£1.49 million)

Canterbury

Nine new worshipping communities throughout the diocese and the Channel Islands, based on the model of "Ignite", a church gathering which aims to reach marginalised and deprived communities. Ignite offers an unconditional welcome to all and weekly meetings involve food and a magazine-style service based around short interactive activities and input exploring a Christian theme.

The Bishop of Dover, Trevor Willmott, said: "The Gospel is core to everything Ignite is about. It begins with unconditional welcome to all who walk through the door, the assurance that they utterly belong and that Jesus is good news for them too, no matter who they are or where they've been. We've been simply astonished by the success of the first Ignite congregations and we can't wait to see what happens next."

(£887,015)

Ely

Changing Market Towns church growth project in Wisbech, March, Chatteris, Littleport, Ramsey, Huntingdon and Downham Market. The funding will help attract new congregations and set up new forms of church services. It will also help to pay for a network of community support workers with family, youth and other specialisms, leading the work of the Church of England in the area in transforming their communities. Other elements of the project will include the development of a learning community for theology and mission in Wisbech. This will aim to equip lay (non-ordained) ministers and other trained volunteers to develop new partnerships between the churches and the wider community.

The Rt Revd Stephen Conway, Bishop of Ely, said: "I am delighted that this major project has received support from the Strategic Development

Fund. We hope that, through it, very many more people will be enabled to join a journey of faith and share in God's work of transforming their communities. It is far-reaching, complex and ambitious and an expression of our faith in the power of God."

(£2.13 million)

Exeter

New churches in three estates on the outskirts of Plymouth. As well as bringing renewed spiritual life to their communities, the churches will work with families, children and young people and will have close links with Christians Against Poverty (CAP). There will be a part-time debt coach working from each of the new churches, together with job clubs and a chance for residents to attend CAP's Money Course. It is hoped that the new church communities will result in up to nine new churches in and around the city.

The Rt Revd Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter, said: "We are thrilled by the news that this project has got the go-ahead and look forward to engaging with people in these communities in new and exciting ways.

"We want the people of Plymouth to experience the joy of knowing God's love and of building friendships within a dynamic church community."

(£1.69 million)

Leicester

Supporting a network of six existing churches in key city centre and market town locations that will provide clergy and help support more new churches in the area. The aim is to see an increase in the size of the worshipping communities within the six churches by 1400 people, to establish 20-50 worshipping communities and to see around one new 'fresh expression' of church, or new form of church gathering, every two years alongside strategic church 'plants' every four years.

Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow, said: "We are delighted that the Church Commissioners are supporting us in responding to God's call to develop more 'resourcing' churches specific to the context of Leicestershire.

"Through them we hope to bless our communities and see God's Kingdom grow, especially in better serving and reaching the 93% of people who are not currently part of any Christian community.

"Please pray for all those involved in an audacious and ambitious vision and, if you are interested in being part of it, we advertise the first four new Associate Vicar roles this week."

(£5.34 million)

Manchester

Projects that will help grow a younger and more diverse church, particularly in areas of high deprivation. The aim is to plant 16 small churches over six years on estates and deprived communities in the poorest areas and those with the lowest church attendance across Greater Manchester and Rossendale.

The money will also enable the Church of England to invest in work with children, families and schools in the Bolton area.

The Bishop of Manchester, Dr David Walker, said: “I’m delighted that Manchester has been supported with this award of over £2 million. Jesus came to bring Good News to the poor and this grant will enable us to grow small churches in our most needy areas that enrich people’s lives through new-found faith and the fellowship of others in their community.

“It will also enable us to engage more deeply with children and families in our Church Schools and local pre-school groups in the Bolton area, helping more young people to retain their Christian faith and identity.”

(£2.14 million)

Newcastle

Project to promote church life in the city centre by creating a church in the city centre that will provide clergy and support to other churches in the area. The church is targeting 17 to 45-year olds who study, live and work in the city centre. This includes around 67,000 students, as well as city workers and their families. Over time, it will act as a catalyst for growth across the whole diocese, offering support and resources to churches throughout Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle.

The Bishop of Newcastle, Christine Hardman, said: “The news that we have been successful in securing such significant funding to create our own Resource Church is wonderful and supports God’s call to us to be faithful and bold in everything that we do. This ambitious and exciting project will help transform Christian life across the Diocese. As the Resource Church grows, it will be able to provide support and resources to other churches as they too seek to grow and develop.”

(£2.6 million)

Peterborough

Generation to Generation project to invest in training and employment of children and youth missionaries to develop innovative and effective outreach and discipleship amongst young people. The project is part of a wider strategy to raise the profile of ministry with children and young people at all levels in the diocese. It will develop the diocese’s successful Youth Ministry Apprenticeship from a one-year programme into a five-year training pathway leading to sustainable employment as licensed children and youth missionaries. Parishes will be supported to develop new patterns of children’s, youth and intergenerational ministry and to act as resource centres for their deanery.

The Bishop of Peterborough, Donald Allister, said: "I am delighted that we have been awarded a grant from the Strategic Development Fund. This is a tribute to the excellent work of Pete White, our Director of Children and Youth, and his team. This money will enable us to deliver degree-level training to youth workers, bringing real benefit to both church and wider community."

(£1.13 million)

Southwell and Nottingham

Project to develop four churches and the creation of future church plants. The grant will help develop 75 new worshipping communities by 2023 along with a School of Discipleship to focus on the spiritual formation and training of lay disciples and leaders in mission. This will incorporate new licensed Lay Ministry/Reader courses training people for a wider range of ministries, including children, youth, worship leading, preaching, nurture groups, pastoral, evangelists and church planting.

The Bishop of Southwell & Nottingham, the Rt Revd Paul Williams, said: "Our ministry in the diocese is sustained through the giving of its congregations and careful management of assets. This extra funding will help us to develop and grow our potential resourcing churches so they are equipped to graft and plant new worshipping communities, as well as support the work of parishes of all sizes across the diocese. We are also pleased to receive funding to further develop our School of Discipleship with the aim of 'Growing Disciples – wider, younger and deeper'."

(£4.67 million)

Worcester

All Saints' Church in Worcester and St Thomas & St Luke in Dudley ('Top Church') will each receive funding to develop their church buildings and employ additional team members to enable them to grow, serve their local communities and become a resource for other churches across the diocese.

The Bishop of Worcester, Dr John Inge, said: "We're absolutely delighted that the Church Commissioners are supporting this new project. Research has shown how bringing resources into an area to fund intentional mission can have an impact much wider than the individual churches. Resourcing Churches have been very successful across the Church of England in bringing more people to faith and All Saints and Top Church are both an important part of the mix as to how we can better serve and reach those who are not currently part of any Christian community."

(£5 million)

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