



ts churches, develop 100 new worshipping communities and renew
new Board set up by the Church of England.

The Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) is to work in partnership with the Diocese of Worcester on its strategy for growth as part of the first awards to be made by the body since it was set up earlier this year.

Under arrangements agreed by the Board, the Diocese will receive £885,000 over eight years to help build its capacity to deliver its programme of growth, including investment in the training of clergy and lay leaders.

The Board has also agreed in principle to an estimated investment of £6.8 million - with funds released subject to approval of additional plans - for renewals at seven parish churches in the Greater Dudley and Redditch areas. These parishes would in turn support and resource neighbouring churches.

The Diocese aims to double the number of children and young people worshipping in its churches and start 100 new worshipping communities by 2030. A programme of parish renewals will aim to ensure that every major area of population has a flourishing church of at least 150 worshippers.

The strategy builds on work already under way and previously supported by Strategic Development Funding (SDF) such as at All Saints Worcester, where the church has provided support to plant a new congregation at St Peter's Bengeworth.

At Top Church in Dudley, which is now open six days a week and used by a range of community groups, the congregation has grown more than ten-fold from 15 people in 2018 to 180 regular worshippers – and continues to grow.

The Diocese of Worcester strategy reflects the Church of England's aims of doubling the number of children and young people in the Church of England by 2030 and ensuring that it fully represents the communities it serves in age and diversity.

The Bishop of Worcester, John Inge, said: "We are delighted that the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board has enthusiastically endorsed our vision to ensure we have as many healthy and sustainable churches as possible by 2030.

"We know we need to make major changes if we want to reverse the decline in numbers of people attending our churches; this funding along with our investment in our other priorities will, by God's grace, enable us to do this."



In separate awards by the Board, the Diocese of Southwark is to receive £6.5 million for work over six years including training for 25 estates lay pioneers.

This will take inspiration from the Mustard Seed programme in the Diocese of York, where 49 people will have completed a programme of training in lay leadership and mission by this Easter. *(Pictured above, a youth group, run by a lay leader from the programme)*

The grant will also fund churches to provide advice and support to other parishes hoping to reach more people in their communities with the message of the Christian faith.

These include St John the Divine in Kennington, south east London, which has successful choral work and youth outreach and St Matthew's Church in the Elephant and Castle, a bilingual Spanish and English church where the congregation has grown from 50 to 250 worshippers.

The Diocese of Manchester will receive £3.6 million over five years for work on a major new church, in partnership with the Church Revitalisation Trust, to cater for a rapid growth in the number of people – particularly young adults and students - living in Manchester city centre.

The funding will pay for a staff team, refurbishment of a building and other costs. Under the plans, the church would foster further Christian renewal in the diocese by planting other local church communities.

John Spence, Chair of the SMMIB, said: "I am delighted that we are able to announce the first round of awards by the Strategic Mission and Ministry Board for these inspiring and hopeful plans for the future.

"They demonstrate the Church's commitment to supporting our parishes and all parts of the church in their mission to ensure that every one has the chance to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

"We look forward to seeing other dioceses bring forward plans for the Vision and Strategy for their areas, for revitalising parishes, creating new worshipping communities, and reaching many more children and young people."



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