27,000 people became regular attenders at church services and gatherings supported by the Church of England's Strategic Development Funding.
An estimated 27,000 people became regular attenders at church services and gatherings supported by the Church of England's Strategic Development Funding (SDF) programme, it was revealed today.

Figures from evaluations, annual reports, internal summaries and updates show 26-27,000 people newly participating in different church gatherings backed by SDF. These range from parents bringing their children to Messy churches to those attending morning and evening church services.

A further 4,000 to 5,000 new leaders - those taking lay leadership roles or exploring ordained vocations - and 900 to 1,000 new worshipping communities - from church plants to chaplaincies and café churches - were formed through mission projects backed by SDF.

The aggregated figures, provided in a range of different ways, included projects launched up to and including 2022.

SDF backed programmes include the Diocese of Sheffield's Transforming Children's Youth and Families' Work project, which has invested in 14 youth workers serving parishes across the diocese, 16 intern posts and centres in Doncaster to support local youth projects.

More than 6,000 children and young people have engaged with the project through over 170 activities with faith content. More than one in five are exploring their faith further in discipleship groups.

In the Diocese of Manchester, the Children Changing Places project has so far engaged with more than 8,000 children and young people in worship and Christian activities, through school and church. More than 400 adults worship with their children.

Lay leadership programmes supported by SDF include the Mustard Seed programme in the Diocese of York, where 49 people have completed a programme of training in lay leadership and mission since 2021 and a further 28 people are currently part of its Stepping Up development programme.

Churches that have been supported by SDF funds include St John's Crawley, in Sussex, where 12 lay preachers have been trained and 350 people now regularly attend on Sundays, up from around 40 in 2017.

Top Church in Dudley, in the Diocese of Worcester, has seen its congregation increase more than ten-fold from 15 people in 2018 to 180 regular worshippers and 600 people now regularly attend Saint Mary's in Southampton, with more than half of its congregation under 35, from a congregation of 25 people in 2018.

Carl Hughes, Chair of the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) said: “Strategic Development Funding has been distributed through and by dioceses to support parishes in their mission of sharing the Christian faith, particularly to groups traditionally under-represented in Church of England congregations.

“This latest picture covers a range of different projects with different time frames and different goals, so they necessarily provide only a snap shot of the progress of SDF supported projects.
“But they give us a sense of the magnitude of change, and some examples of growth. It is heartening to see so many projects doing so well in spite of the disruption of the Covid lockdowns.

"It is important to bear in mind that these figures are not about comparing projects or only highlighting those that have seen numerical growth. Numerous projects have revitalised communities and enriched the spiritual life of those involved. Their impact cannot be measured.”

**More information**

- The SDF programme, launched in 2014, has allocated money from the Archbishops’ Council to dioceses for mission projects in local communities and among groups of the population that are currently under-represented in church congregations. The Strategic Mission and Investment Board (SMMIB) which launched earlier this year has responsibility for overseeing the impact of existing projects under this funding stream.

- 12 tranches of funding were allocated between 2014 and the conclusion of the stream in 2022, supporting 92 projects with awards totalling £198 million.

- Of this, £116 million has been drawn down, and funds continue to be disbursed for the 77 ongoing projects.

- The review did not undertake fresh research but drew from existing information covering a period of time that includes the Covid-19 lockdowns. Evaluation reports were not available for all 92 projects.

- Under recommendations from the Chote report into SDF and Lowest Income Communities funding published last year, the Church of England's Vision and Strategy Team is working on a common set of measures for reporting on mission projects.

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