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The Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) has approved awards to the Dioceses of Blackburn, London and Southwark totalling £64 million for mission programmes set to last for between six and nine years.

The Board has backed plans for a £25.5 million investment in a programme of renewal in the Diocese of Blackburn over nine years, helping to fund parish renewal, lay pioneer ministry and ministry to children and young people.

The grant will also support the renewal of church life in urban areas and, through a freshly designed programme of CME (Continuing Ministerial Education), support clergy wellbeing and development.

Under the arrangements, £12 million will be given in the first phase and a further £13.5 million has been agreed in principle for two more stages of work, subject to evaluation of progress.

The programmes will build on nationally funded work in Blackburn, Blackpool and Preston which has supported youth ministry, parish revitalisation, and outer estate leadership and which has contributed to above average increases in adult and children attendance in the Diocese.



The Bishop of Blackburn, Philip North, said: "In the past few years we have set a bold path for growth in the Diocese and we have done so because we long for people across our county to find life in relationship with Jesus.

"This new investment will make a massive difference to our common life.

"It will enable us, for example, to expand our ministry to the young; strengthen church life in urban areas; offer enhanced support to clergy and sustain pioneering programmes of work such as M:Power (lay leadership training in urban contexts) and our 'Parish Renewal Programme'."

The Diocese of Southwark has been awarded £21.6 million with a further £7.4 million from 2027, subject to further approvals, to help fund a nine-year programme including extensive renewal and development for parishes of all traditions.

The grant focuses on parish revitalisation and will also fund apprentice-style training for ministry with children and young people, supporting churches across the diocese, and work to ensure greater diversity in lay and ordained vocations.

The planned programme also includes more new worshipping communities and bilingual churches.

The diocese aims to build on successful work already under way through work previously backed by Strategic Development Funding such as at St Matthew's bilingual church in the Elephant and Castle, south London, and St Peter's Brockley, which have welcomed more than 500 new congregation members.

The Bishop of Southwark, Christopher Chessun, said: "I am delighted at this outcome, bringing to fruition our overriding commitment to all our parishes.

"I am grateful to the national Church for investing in our potential and endorsing our renewed Southwark Vision to be Christ-centred and outward focused in all we do. In this Diocese, resources always follow vision - and not the other way around."

The Diocese of London has been awarded £9.4 million of funding to support its Hackney and Islington Programme over six years.

The deaneries of Hackney and Islington in the Stepney Episcopal Area are home to a population of 500,000 people, of which a third are under 19. They also have the highest level of social housing in the UK.

The programme of transformation will focus on ministry in low-income communities, new worshipping communities, church planting, children and youth work, and renewal of small to medium sized parishes broadly in the catholic tradition.

The investment will bring in over 20 new roles, including four clergy missionary roles, to support parishes in the Stepney Area.

The plans include parish revitalisations and estates missionaries, as well as 'youth ministers' serving 21 parishes – each with a youth minister and youth apprentice.

The programme of renewal also provides support to parishes in the catholic tradition to develop their mission and growth and to create nine new worshipping communities.

The Bishop of Stepney, Joanne Grenfell, said: "Our diocesan vision is for every Londoner to know the love of God in Jesus Christ.

"We want our churches to grow in health, depth, impact, and numbers, and to be able to reach every part of the deaneries of Hackney and Islington.

"By God's grace and with this funding, we can now give much needed support and resource to 28 parishes, particularly those in younger and less affluent areas, with the aim of growing the churches towards health and sustainability by 2030."

The three dioceses are receiving the grants from the Board's Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP), with their plans for renewal building on previous projects backed by Strategic Development Funding.

Carl Hughes, Chairman of the SMMIB, said: "We are grateful to the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council for their generous funding of these very significant long term programmes, working in partnership with the dioceses and the Board to ensure that parish churches from all traditions are renewed and revitalised in their mission to share the good news of the Gospel.

"I am pleased to see the strong focus on working with children and young people and the emphasis on low income areas.

"We are investing in the future, while building on the successes and learning from previous work supported by Strategic Development Funding."

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