

RENEWING HOPE THROUGH RURAL MINISTRY AND MISSION – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the programme about?

The *RHRMM* programme is designed to drive numerical and spiritual growth in churches through identifying, enthusing and equipping rural leaders of the future, and resourcing those who now minister in rural contexts. It consists of the following strands:

- Rural placements for young adults (18-30) considering whether they have a call to ordained ministry, to allow them to explore in a rural context God's call to them.
- A Rural Training Pathway designed in conjunction with Sarum College, to equip those training for ordained ministry for the specific challenges of ministry in the countryside.
- Placements for serving clergy in mid-career but without rural experience, allowing them to explore a possible move to rural ministry.
- A four-year development programme called 'Leading into Growth' for ordained and lay rural church leaders.
- Support for parishes in local mission and ministry through facilitation, seed-corn funding for mission projects, topic-based training and mentoring.

Salisbury seeks to be a beacon diocese, developing best practice for rural ministry and mission, which can be spread across the Church of England.

What is Strategic Development Funding?

The Strategic Development Fund is money for mission made available to dioceses by the Church Commissioners, and means *RHRMM* will not be a cost to parishes or the Diocese. The fund is administered by the Archbishops' Council, to invest in projects that support major change and sustainable growth in the Church of England. It was introduced in 2014 to provide funding for Diocesan projects that promised to make a significant difference in their long-term mission and/or financial strength.

Why focus on rural areas?

Like many other dioceses, our biggest challenge is achieving sustained numerical growth particularly in rural areas.

In this diocese over 90% of our parishes, representing half of the population, are rural. Of the parishes where membership has declined by at least 10% in the last five years, more than 80% are rural, so whether the rural church is thriving or declining has a disproportionate impact. Our programme aims to help the rural churches that are shrinking to join those that are growing.

With so much attention being given to city and suburban churches, lessons learned here can help rural churches/dioceses across the country. In turn, we will benefit from lessons learned through other Strategic Development Funding-supported projects in other dioceses.

Who did you consult when drawing up this programme?

The local consultations started through the 'Let Us Talk' consultation in 2012. We carried out an analysis of the make-up of the diocese carried out in 2014 and the age profile of our ministers. From there it was clear that more resources were needed for our rural ministry and that is why the Priorities within the Renewing Hope Vision included the aim to provide more resources for Rural Ministry. This document was discussed and approved by Diocesan Synod in 2015.

Since then there have been a series of 24-hour residentials for 60 rural incumbents which talked about the issues. We also discussed it with our Rural Deans. The Bishops and Archdeacons have had various conversations with incumbents on these matters and various members of staff working with parishes and benefices have reported back on the needs and challenges for both ministry and mission.

The Director of Learning for Discipleship and Ministry has also had a number of requests for specific areas of training and there has been national research on the subject that we have used. We have also

developed some successful projects such as the urban CEMES experience scheme which we want to offer to rural areas.

Finally, the programme provides for 4 part-time and one full time role which are specifically there to support parishes and deaneries with their parish development and mission. These will be experienced practitioners with time available to resource and work alongside. We will be consulting widely on what the main priorities for these roles will be before we appoint so that they meet local needs.

I am not in a rural benefice; what is in it for me?

Lots. *RHRMM* will help us make training and resources for mission more widely and easily available to every parish in the Dioceses. Each archdeaconry will have its own Mission Field Officer to help parishes and benefices, whether rural or not, develop, resource, and take forward their mission plans.

Moreover, growth in rural parishes helps the whole Diocese by keeping share down for everyone.

How do we know this is going to help grow the Church?

The projects that form part of *RHRMM* are evidence-based, with a track record of driving church growth locally and further afield.

Sources of evidence include reports produced by the national church and the Church Growth Research Programme, including *Released for Mission*, *Growing the Rural Church*, and *Going Deeper*; experience with local pilot projects such as Energising Local Ministry; the experience gained from recently driving a rapid and significant increase in the number of vocations in the Diocese; and using church leadership courses such as *Leading Your Church into Growth and Thrive* with a proven and demonstrable track record of helping both lay and ordained church leaders to grow their congregations. We know that many of the new congregations in this diocese are led by lay people so this joint working is vital.

One of the points of this programme was the recognition that it was becoming increasingly difficult to attract clergy to rural benefices and this was affecting ministry provision. Our experience is that good local ministerial leadership is key to helping parishes grow in numbers, depth and impact.

Part of the reason for the difficulty was that those training for ministry and those already in ministry were not aware of the distinctive nature of rural ministry. To address this there are 3 areas of the programme that are aimed at getting more people applying for posts in rural benefices: Internships for those looking at those exploring ministry, a specific rural training pathway for those training for ordination and rural placements for those in training (both for ordained ministry and for licenced lay ministry) and those already in ministry.

Across the Church of England, there has been a rapid rise in the number of young people training for ordained ministry; a 14% increase in those starting training in 2017, with a quarter of those aged 32 or under. This has been the fruit of a well-thought programme, which included one-year parish placements that saw a high proportion of participants recommended for training for ordained ministry. These were almost entirely in urban and suburban areas; it is important that some of our future priests are formed in rural contexts.

Why is this a priority for the Diocese? Surely God gives growth anyway?

As is the case in most of the country, the long-term picture of church attendance in the Diocese is one of slow but sustained decline for many decades. When Bishop Nicholas visited every Deanery in 2015, there was universal rejection of the idea that managing decline was an acceptable model. Therefore, we need a plan for growth and we need to be willing to experiment and take risks.

Growth is God's to give but He can only bless us with it if we sow seeds and tend them in faith (1 Cor 3:6). That is why the Diocese's overall vision is *Pray, Serve, Grow*: our plans for growth do not exist in isolation, but are rooted in our existing life of worship, service and witness. We can only flourish if we are faithful to God and loving to our neighbours.

Small parishes are having increasingly difficulty with the management of their buildings and the administration of their churches. What help and support (process, administrative and perhaps financial) are the rural, small Parish Churches likely to get in the future to help them sustain mission and grow?

The recently approved Church Buildings policy has placed emphasis on the deaneries looking at the place of church buildings within their deanery plans.

Our energising local ministry advisor can help benefices to look at process and working differently to release more time for mission.

The plan includes provision for mission field officers to work with parishes on their plans.

We hope that, once we have the Rural Ministry and Mission programme up and running we will be able to begin work on another bid to provide further support to parishes. This is mentioned in the current bid document.

Why is share increasing if we have Strategic Development Funding?

Strategic Development Funding is to support dioceses that have viable plans for growth that could not be raised through share. It is over and above diocesan funds and the national Church will not fund routine diocesan expenditure through this programme. This is work we would not otherwise be able to undertake should we have not received additional funding.

Who will oversee this programme?

Like all large programmes, we need to have the right oversight and governance in place. The programme reports to the Bishop's Council through a dedicated Steering Group and will have a dedicated part-time Programme Manager to oversee the projects.

The role of the steering group is to assure the Bishop's Council that the programme is on track, provide strategic direction, support the Programme Director and Programme Manager and ensure coherence across these areas of Mission and Ministry. Members of the steering group are: The Bishops of Ramsbury and Sherborne, the Archdeacon of Sarum as Chair of the Mission Council, two lay chairs (Gillian Clarke and Debbie McLissac) and one rural dean (the Revd. David Baldwin) from across the dioceses and is chaired by the Diocesan Secretary.

Reporting to the Programme Steering group will be a programme board working with the programme manager on the day to day management of the project to ensure that delivery kept on track.

What will happen when the funding ends in 4 years?

RHRMM has been designed with long-term sustainability in mind. We intend to resource the programme after 2022 in the following ways:

1. We will train and grow a team of experienced participants in the 'Leading into Growth' stream who will be able to support and develop others
2. The Leading into Growth programme will, in time, generate more contributions to Fairer Share as church membership grows, though we recognise that as people join a church they do not start giving sacrificially until, it is reckoned, four years after joining.
3. We will develop partnerships with external bodies such as the Germinate Arthur Rank Centre to enable resources to be shared in the future.
4. We will share our learning with other dioceses to encourage them to send individuals onto the Rural Training Pathway so that there is sufficient funding for Sarum College to take over the funding of the teaching element.
5. Our Suffragan and Archdeacon Teams in Dorset and Wiltshire will consider how simplification and administration sharing can be implemented with a view of lifting the burden from the rural churches.

Primarily these plans for sustainability are centred around the same objectives as the diocesan strategic vision – that if we grow vocations and grow membership we will be able to fund projects that work to support our rural church.

Monitoring and evaluation is an important part of the project and if the expected outcomes are not delivered (there are interim objectives too) then those items of work will be stopped and the funding cease.

How can I find out more and get involved?

In the first instance, visit the website: www.salisbury.anglican.org/ministry/rhrmm which we will keep up to date with progress and opportunities.

RHRMM is a unique opportunity to play a part in the renewal of the rural church and through that to a revival of English Christianity.

If you would like to serve God in this programme or any of its strands, please contact, initially, your local bishop or archdeacon, the Director of Learning for Discipleship and Ministry, Jane Charman, or the Deputy Diocesan Secretary, Stephen Dawson. Once we have other posts in place we will publish the contact details.