

## **Our Shared Future**

### **- a framework for the Diocese of Coventry**

#### **Introduction for Diocesan Synod**

This document is an updated version of Our Shared Future which was approved by the Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod in 2022. The framework sets out how we will achieve our vision and mission purpose.

It has been developed following the listening phase of the annual cycle and responds to the feedback we have received from parishes, clergy and stakeholders who attended the strategy and vision day, or responded to the parish needs survey and the Archdeacons' Articles of Enquiry.

It is a maturing of the key priorities, outcomes and existing key commitments set out in the 2023 framework. These were identified through the engagement we undertook earlier in the year and have been refined with input from the national church's Strategy & Vision Consultant for the West Midlands, to ensure alignment with the national Church's priorities and bold outcomes.

The document also incorporates several new sections including context, key challenges and opportunities, measures and resource, for example. It now also includes a section on the mission design which articulates the growth strategy approved by Diocesan Synod in 2020.

The document is now more consistent with other Dioceses' strategy documents and this is an important next step as we move towards developing a bid for strategic mission and ministry investment funding.

Our Shared Future will be supported by an annual plan which will clearly set out the work and activities we will undertake each year in our journey towards the 2030 vision.

This work will be supported by the Bishop's Strategy Integration Group, a strategy consultation group, made up of clergy and laity, who will work to develop the outcomes and measures that we need. It will also be supported operationally by various steering groups or programme groups for each of the identified workstreams.

The updated document has been reviewed by the Bishop's Strategy Integration Group and the Bishop's Council.

**Diocesan Synod are asked to note the updated Our Shared Future framework**

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## 1 Introduction

In November 2022, the *Our Shared Future* framework was approved by Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod. It draws together the strands of our core work and key commitments outlined in the document and sets the direction to 2030. In order to realise this vision, we need to work together as a whole diocese – churches, schools, chaplaincies and cathedral – served and supported by our diocesan staff, synods, boards and committees.

This updated document provides the strategic framework for doing so. It is not a set of new initiatives that are being imposed from above. It reflects what we have heard from parishes, clergy and others; developed and refined after a period of listening and discernment throughout early 2023, and then seeking and following God's guidance on how we best support one another, empowered by God's own 'Spirit of Life' and working in the name of God's own Son, 'the Resurrection and the Life'.

Going forward we will be seeking significant National Church investment and partnership during this strategic period and have aligned our plans to the Church of England's [three priorities and six bold outcomes](#), while keeping the Diocese of Coventry-specific priorities.

We look to a period of ministerial and parochial development, growth, positive community impact with long term environmental responsibility and developing a plan for financial sustainability upon which to move forward.

Everyone is invited to be part of our shared future.

God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your church,  
send your Holy Spirit to give vision to our planning,  
wisdom to our actions,  
and power to our witness.  
help us to grow in numbers,  
in spiritual commitment to you,  
and in service to our local community.  
through Jesus Christ our Lord  
Amen

## 2 Our context

The Diocese of Coventry represents the Church of England in Coventry and Warwickshire. The diocese was re-established in 1911 and currently comprises of 244 local churches, 76 church schools, Coventry Cathedral with its internationally renowned ministry of reconciliation and restoration, and Chaplaincies in hospitals, universities and prisons across the diocese.

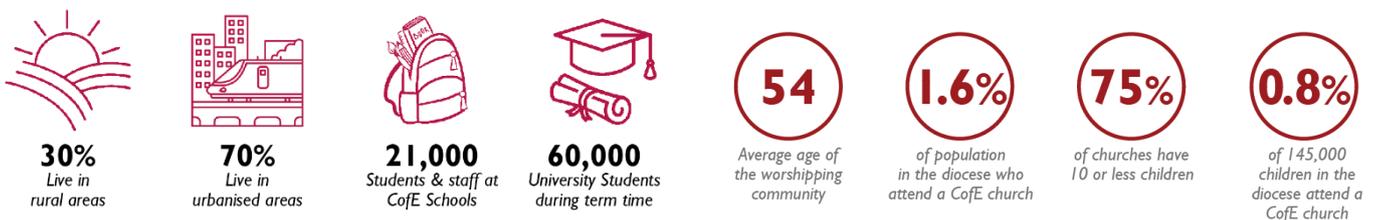
### Population

The Diocese is home to around 895,000 people across Warwickshire and a little of Solihull. 70% of the population live across four major urban population areas the largest of which is the multicultural City of Coventry which is home to 384,000 people.

More populous areas include industrial and market towns such as Nuneaton and Rugby to the north and east respectively, with the historic towns of Leamington-Spa, Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick with its famous castle sitting more centrally in the diocese. There is a full range of socio-economic circumstances experienced in the diocese from very wealthy and affluent to more deprived areas with 25 of our parishes currently in the UK's poorest 20%.

Two thirds of our parishes are categorised as rural or semi-rural accounting for a significant amount of the diocese geographically with over 2000 hectares of farmlands and acres of countryside stretching as far the Cotswolds to the south.

The Diocese of Coventry has 2 universities with 60,000 students during term time feeding into the continuing tradition of innovation and enterprise. The diocese is diverse, rich in culture and history, and is the birthplace of both Shakespeare and rugby football.



### Worshipping Community

The diocese has a total worshipping community of approximately 14,400 with an average weekly attendance of 8,400 with 12% being children. In recent years it's been more helpful to use the phrase 'worshipping community' to track church sizes as the average worshipper now attends church on a Sunday less frequently but would still consider themselves an active member of the church community, this is even more so since the global pandemic.

The diocese has 209 Clergy of which 103 are stipendiary. They are supported in their ministry by a further 100 people with permission to officiate (PTOs) some of which are our readers and licenced lay ministers who currently number around 130. There is also a total of 317 registered church wardens and of course innumerable volunteers in each parish who make ministry possible and fruitful.

All ministry is overseen by our Bishops; governed by various synods, councils, boards, paid staff and committees. The diocesan office serves the parishes with around 40 people in various full time and part time roles facilitating and supporting the ministry and mission of the diocese. There is a team of seven people who make up our Diocesan Board of Education team working to support our 76 Church of England schools.

### 3 Key challenges and opportunities

#### Challenges

The Church of England nationally has many current challenges including numerical and financial decline, division over LLF, past and present safeguarding reviews and historic inequalities and current lack of diversity.

As well as navigating these the Diocese of Coventry experiences various challenges and opportunities more specific to our context. Most recently these have been identified via focused reporting and listening exercises throughout early 2023.

Our diocesan wide listening period found:

- Significant opportunity for ministry and mission with children, young people and families.
- The desire for more leadership development and volunteer training.
- An increasing impact of church building management on clergy and volunteers.
- A growing need for specialist support for parishes.

An in-depth report of one of our more rural deaneries was also commissioned with findings indicating that attendance was in sharp decline due to ageing congregations and less young people populating rural areas. An overall decline in volunteer numbers with 83% of PCCs reporting that they have less than 10 volunteers and significant number parishes being classed as vulnerable with important roles not being filled or filled by only one person. With well over 150 listed buildings across the diocese, managing old buildings is a significant strain on ageing volunteer group and a growing burden on clergy, taking energy and joy away from mission. An estimated £4.5m of repair work needed shows the scale of the issue just in one rural deanery.

#### Opportunities

Of all the opportunities we have across the diocese working with children, families and young people is seen as the greatest. As well as reaching the 18,000 children in the 76 Church of England schools many churches are ministering within their local context with some employing Children and Family workers. This ties in with the national Church of England's strategy to become younger and value children and young people.

New housing estates are a key part of Warwickshire County Council's plans for more housing with over 10,000 new houses being built in the Rugby deanery alone over the last 10 years. A strategic and missional growth strategy is already underway for the diocese helping to focus resource into growing the church both younger and numerically.

The diocese is home to many wonderful clergy who each bring individual talents and gifts to their communities and the wider diocese. There is also a commitment to releasing the passionate and talented volunteers and lay ministers we have by creating lay ministry pathways.

Reconciliation is central to our mission and ministry. Internationally, our Cathedral is recognised as one of the world's oldest religious-based centres for reconciliation, and its work in recent decades has involved it in some of the world's most difficult and long-standing areas of conflict. Today the medieval ruins continue to remind us of our human capacity both to destroy and to reach out to our enemies in friendship and reconciliation.

***“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”***

2 Corinthians 5:18

## 4 Our Vision, Our Mission

### Our vision for the future:

- to be 'bearers of life' with  
**Restored health** – as we worship God who heals us.  
**New growth** – as we make new disciples.  
**Renewed relationships** – as we transform communities.

***“I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly”***

John 10:10

### Our mission purpose is to:

- Worship God – Make New Disciples – Transform Communities

## 5 Our six key priorities

To achieve our vision, we have six key priorities.

1. Our Parishes/Benefices are Healthy Churches fostering healthy communities; (partnering and engaging with the social, spiritual and practical needs of those we serve)
2. Accessible worship and church communities for all in a mixed ecology of tradition and style
3. Growth in children, families and young people on a faith journey
4. Growing numbers of leaders equipped for mission focused ministry
5. The Cathedral, churches and individuals living out the ministry of reconciliation
6. Responsible stewardship of God's creation

By God's grace, we hope to have reached the following outcomes by 2030:

- Every parish will have an appropriate mission action plan (priorities 1-6)
- A mission hub/resourcing church in every significant area of population (priorities 1-4)
- At least 150 new worshipping communities in a variety of styles and locations (including church schools) (priorities 1-5)
- Children, young people and families across the diocese are connected with our mission via schools' ministry, parish or local mission partnerships (priorities 1-4)
- Diverse, healthy and emotionally intelligent lay and ordained leaders in every church (priorities 1,4,5)
- Cultural, structural and behavioural change on issues of racial justice (priorities 1,4,5,)
- Each Deanery having a recognised team facilitating and resourcing healthy relationships and conflict/difference transformation ministry (priorities 1,4,5)
- To have reduced energy consumption and carbon emissions across our buildings (priorities 1,6)

## 6 Our mission design

### Theological themes

A number of theological themes guide and shape our shared work in mission. These help us realise our vision inspired by Jesus' promise of abundant life in John 10:10, and our vision of Restored Health, New Growth and Renewed Relationships. *(2 Cor 5:18)*

**Our vision for Healthy Churches.** The Body of Christ, reconciled relationships with one another and with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. *(Jn 10:10, Jn 15, 2 Cor 5.18)*

**A shared call and commission in the Missio Dei.** Our participation in God's mission, enabled through the gift and life of the Holy Spirit to all God's people calling, inviting and sending us to make Christ known, to make new disciples and baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *(Mat 28:16-20)*

**The Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit.** This birthed the church of Jesus Christ enabling the commission of Christ to share the Good News in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. *(Acts 1.8, Acts 2:1-47)*

- This call leads us to the familiar and the less familiar and to see God at work already especially in liminal or boundary places with people yet to own our faith.
- The early church grew as new boundaries and thresholds were crossed through the work of the Spirit – Acts 9. Peter and Cornelius and Paul's response to a dream which diverts his missionary trip from Troas in modern day Turkey to Macedonia in modern day Greece to plant the first European church. *(Acts 16:9-15)*

**God's mission imperative.** As described by Jesus in his 'Nazareth manifesto'. *(Luke 4 & Isaiah 61)*

- To serve our communities, with a special focus on the poor and marginalized.
- Our shared participation as those called and anointed by the Spirit of God.
- Love, recognition, value, welcome and inclusion of those often unseen, unheard and excluded (Modelled in Jesus' ministry to 'tax collectors & sinners', The Samaritan women at the well etc.).

**The work of loving service.** Service, social justice, and seeking the common good in our communities modelled by the early church emerging in the book of Acts.

**To build up and build in.** The church is called to be a community that builds one another up in love and nurture one another in worship, prayer and our common life. *(Rom 12:9-21, Eph 3:14-19, Eph 4:1-13, Phil 2:1-11, Col 2:1-6)*

**Declaration.** How can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. *(Romans 10:8-17)*

Given our mission context, our shared call, reverence for Christ with lives that give glory to God, our mission design will resource and build confidence in renewing whole life vocation of God's people, evangelism or witness, and sharing the reason for our hope *(1 Peter 3.13-18)*. Inspired by Peter and Cornelius in Acts 9, we seek to follow the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit in recognising 'Kairos' moments that lead us to cross new thresholds for growing faith, reaching new people, and founding new faith communities.

### The mission challenge & opportunity

The Church Urban Fund suggests there is significant opportunity for mission as more than 50% of the population are in contact

with parish churches. The Diocese of Coventry's presence and relationships across our communities has increased fringe activities during the pandemic whilst our community transformation work has enhanced our social capital with local authorities and grant making bodies. Our 76 Church schools with over 18,000 children presents further missional opportunity leading to events like 'Alive 2023' representing the continuing work within this aspect of our mission priority.

Despite increasing secularisation there remains a high level of latent Christian spirituality and general interest in spirituality in the nation. The Talking Jesus 2022 research confirms that there remains considerable openness to exploring Christian spirituality. Whilst the 'Nones' research following the 2021 Census shows an increase in those not adhering to any faith, however Gen Z are showing a neutral and non-hostile view of Christianity and a willingness to engage in appropriate dialogue.

This in many ways confirms that we inhabit a mission context not vastly different from that of the early church. The history of the Church of England shows us that we have a heritage of planting new churches, and evidence shows that when we plant new churches people encounter Christ who have no previous church connections.

Our mission design aims to deliver key outcomes in response to contemporary

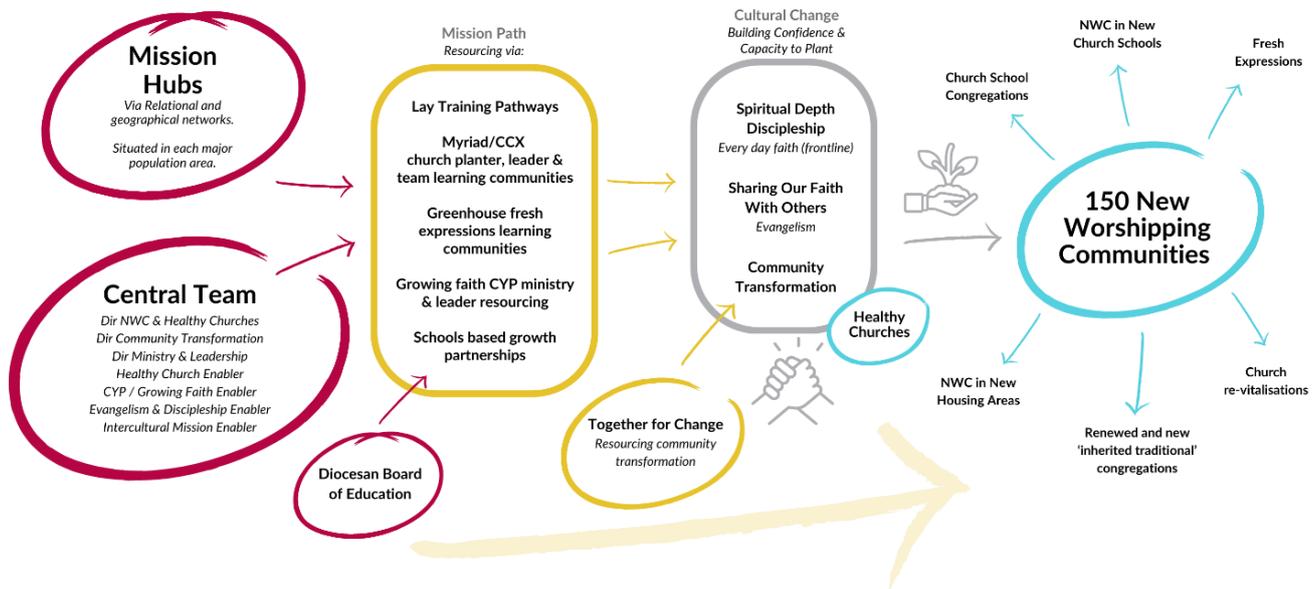
challenges and opportunities we recognise. This includes our vision for numerical growth with spiritual depth, through development and launch of 150 new worshipping communities in variety of contexts and traditions in a mixed ecology approach.

To achieve our aim, we are investing in some core aspects of resourcing for ordained and lay leaders, and church members.

- Enhanced development of Healthy church enabling.
- Recognition of a unique 'Front Line' call (growing in our baptismal promise / discipleship) for every person in every context.
- Growing our confidence in telling and sharing our stories of faith as the opportunity arises through our everyday lives. (Supported by Talking Jesus research findings and spiritual openness of Gen Z)
- Roll out of a wider framework for enabling lay ministry and leadership.
- Our ongoing commitment to community transformation and the role of the local church within this.
- Growing younger with our 'Growing Faith' vision and growing in diversity.
- Integrating our mission activity with church schools, building on the success of ALIVE 2023.

# OUR MISSION DESIGN

Numerical Growth, Spiritual Depth



The mission design is supported through the ministry of our Mission Hub Churches, St Marks City resource church, our Central Mission and Discipleship Team, other diocesan support staff, and implementation of training and learning Pathways for lay and ordained leaders.

***We have also identified seven distinct workstreams to resource our mission design***

## **1 Healthy Churches - promoting the essential qualities of church health**

For over a decade, the Diocese of Coventry has been encouraging churches to engage with Natural Church Development (NCD). In particular, the eight essential qualities of healthy churches has been promoted as a means of helping them to flourish. The national Church of England is also promoting “healthy churches” from a safeguarding perspective. Our churches must be safe and welcoming places for all – this is an imperative of the Christian gospel.

## **2 Healthy Communities - meeting social, spiritual and practical needs of those we serve**

Helping and serving lies at the heart of our diocesan purpose to “transform communities”. The need is greater than ever, since the health of local communities has been weakened by the pandemic – and is further threatened by the cost of living crisis. Churches, schools, chaplaincies and the cathedral are serving their local communities in a wide variety of imaginative ways – some of which are being supported

by Diocesan Mission Fund grants. In partnership with Together for Change, the diocese is also supporting projects in the most deprived parishes. For example: Saints Nuneaton; our Rural Life Officers; youth work initiatives; support for poorer communities with food and fuel poverty; and support for refugees.

## **3 New Worshipping Communities - reaching out to those who are missing**

Worshipping communities come in all shapes and sizes. Some large, some small, some in the city, some in our towns, some in villages, some are quite traditional and some are more contemporary. But they all have one thing in common – they are committed to worshipping God, making new disciples and transforming communities. Some of these new communities might look completely different to anything that has gone before. Perhaps aimed specifically at people who have never been connected to a church. Some might be more familiar, like messy church or café church. During the pandemic we saw the amazing development of online worship gathering people together,

reaching out to new people, drawing them into the life of the church. We value this diversity, and our vision during the current decade is for new worshipping communities that are equally diverse.

#### **4 Children, Young People and Families - inviting them to come on a faith journey**

The Diocese is a trailblazer diocese for the national Growing Faith initiative. The aim is to find ways for churches, schools and families to work together in supporting the faith development of children and to celebrate and recognise their place in God's family. Each year Coventry Cathedral welcomes over 20,000 school children to experience the presence of God through worship and learning, and providing opportunities for staff and pupils to know the reconciling Christ and His ministry. Our Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is also strengthening the partnership between churches, schools and families through the legacy of Alive 2023.

#### **5 Growing Leaders - enabling and equipping both new and current leaders**

Three important roles of every diocese are to inspire people, to help them hear God's call in their own lives, and to equip them for their unique ministry. In the Diocese we are developing our Equip Hub to provide a single point of contact for high quality learning, training and resourcing. We are populating it with locally produced resources that showcase good practice and innovation from across the diocese. In 2022 we developed a new framework for releasing, recognising and resourcing lay ministry across the diocese and this work will continue alongside our annual Continuing Ministerial Development programme.

#### **6 Renewing the Environment - caring for creation, both locally and globally**

The Diocesan Environment Group continues to inspire, encourage, challenge and resource people to take seriously our God-given vocation to care for the earth, particularly via the promotion of Eco Church. The Net Zero Steering Group is also co-ordinating work to measure and reduce our carbon footprint across the diocese. Data from parish energy audits and the Energy Footprint Tool will enable us to further analyse our current environmental impact and establish the steps needed to reduce it. Action plans will be produced for the key focus areas – churches, schools, the cathedral, diocesan offices, clergy housing and work-related travel.

#### **7 Loving One Another - being a reconciling presence in the heart of our communities**

When we see divisions around us in the world and close to home, the Difference course is equipping communities and individuals to build community cohesion, navigate disagreement, and cross divides through our everyday encounters. Our Race Equality Steering Group has developed a strategy to improve race equality within the diocese. This is done through consultation with the Race Equality Advisory Group (REAG) and churches. The Living in Love and Faith (LLF) project has produced resources to help the whole Church to learn how relationships, marriage and sexuality fit within the bigger picture of a humanity created in the image of God, and to understand each other better. At an international level, our cathedral continues to promote reconciliation through the Community of the Cross of Nails.

## 7 Underpinning work

We have identified 3 workstreams that underpin and support the realisation of our 2030 vision.

### 1. **Healthy people – nurturing the wellbeing of everyone who serves the work of the Diocese**

A wide range of clergy wellbeing resources is available on the diocesan website, nevertheless a clergy wellbeing survey in June 2022 revealed that the average wellbeing of clergy had declined during the previous three years. We have no data for lay people, but it is highly likely that the wellbeing of lay people has also declined as a result of the pandemic. Lessons learnt from promoting clergy wellbeing will be applied to Readers, churchwardens, headteachers, and everyone who serves the work of the diocese.

### 2. **Renewing generosity – supporting others with our time, talents, money**

Our parish share system is based on the principles of generosity and mutual support. When faced with financial hardship, everyone finds it more difficult to be generous. The pandemic and the cost of living crisis are causing financial difficulties throughout the Church of England. Church members find it harder to financially support their local church, and Churches find it harder to pay their parish share. That in turn makes it harder for the Diocesan Board of

Finance to provide the level of support that parishes really need. Living Generously explores how people can live a generous life in response to Christ's generous act of love on the cross.

### 3. **Parish support – appropriate and relevant areas of support for mission**

The Diocesan offices will continue to provide support to parishes including: Safeguarding – training and advice and helping parishes to respond to safeguarding concerns and allegations; paying grants, stipends and pensions; managing investments; administering parish share; and producing budgets, reports and accounts; maintaining and improving our vicarages; resourcing lay ministry; discerning vocations; training ordinands and curates; managing clergy appointments; providing continuing ministerial development; providing HR support; advising about the care and development of churches (including the DAC) and helping to find grants; sharing news, information and resources with parishes; and arranging meetings and providing briefing papers for Diocesan Synod, Bishop's Council, and statutory diocesan committees

## 8 Resourcing the vision and mission

### Our financial strategy

Since Covid19, our income through parish share has not met the cost of parochial ministry and the Diocesan Board of Finance has provided additional financial support to cover the shortfall. The release of historic funds has increased year on year to plug the gap. This cannot continue indefinitely, and we aim to reach financial sustainability by the end of this strategic period. We are aiming to reach the point where annual income (from parish share and other activities) balances with annual expenditure.

Over the next five years, our high-level principles seek to:

- reduce the amount we are drawing from our historic reserves so that by 2030 we are only using this money for strategic activities
- access national church investment when and where available
- continue to pray, be thankful and work for increasing generosity of our parishioners and improve our partnering and communicating with them
- manage our assets so that we can invest more in our mission and ministry
- invest a small percentage of our historic funds to begin delivering to our Net Zero obligations (in anticipation of follow-up support from the national church)
- invest in activities that generate income, either alone, or with parishes, or with suitable public and private partners.

## 9 Key measures

In monitoring delivery and progress towards targets we plan to develop a set of key measures. These are initial thoughts as we undertake work to understand the missional creativity of our churches and create baseline measures and metrics from which we can chart our progress to 2030.

- **Healthy churches** engagement in the number of NCDs/healthy church work and number of parishes with a mission action plan which include hosting Christian enquiry courses and opportunities, courses and events for resourcing everyday faith and developing confidence in sharing our faith story, lived awareness and commitment to greater diversity
- **New worshipping communities** (nwc): growth in the number of communities, new disciples (define R/J/C) by adults and children per nwc, number of churches with a new renewal of disciples and in adults' monthly attendance
- **Children and young people:** monthly attendance split by existing and fresh expression, and number of churches with growth in children and young people attendance, parishes engaging with schools and young disciples in school communities
- **Leaders:** number of people in vocational discernment (by age and cultural background), number of lay leaders signing up for lay learning pathways, number of trained leaders of mission with children and young people and number of new licensed/authorised lay leaders, new ordained leaders, new volunteer leaders, attendance at Clergy Ministerial Development courses
- **Generosity:** movement of parish share, number of planned givers and weekly average planned giving