

Missional and Financial Flourishing Exercise

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does the ‘Missional and Financial Flourishing’ exercise fit with Vision 2026 and the Vision 2026 Implementation Plan (2021 – 2024)?

Seeing ‘Healthy Churches Transforming Communities’ through Making Disciples, Being Witnesses, Growing Leaders and Inspiring Children and Young People is the vision for the Diocese of Blackburn and remains our primary focus and priority. Following a highly consultative process throughout the diocese during 2020, the resultant Vision Implementation Plan (2021 – 2024) sets out how we intend to do this with its emphasis on foundations – on prayer, repentance and asking God to pour out His spirit across Lancashire.

The Missional and Financial Flourishing Exercise is one of the initiatives included in the Vision Implementation Plan. Page 40 of the Plan refers to the missional and financial health of the diocese and the following is outlined:

- *“A coordinated exercise to consult with deaneries to develop the Church Planting Plan (p20), new Parish Renewal Programme (p40) and Leadership and Deployment Plan (p24), prayerfully and collaboratively discerning how and where to invest to reflect the changing demography of Lancashire.”*
- *“Introduction of a new Parish Renewal Programme (p40), supported by external funding, to focus on renewal in those parishes that are struggling the most both missionally and financially, considering pastoral schemes where local consultation discerns that to be appropriate.”*
- *“Enhanced support to parishes in relation to the development of their buildings and how to access grants in relation to capital works through the appointment of a Church Buildings Development Manager / DAC Secretary (p43).”*

“A new small externally funded team is proposed to enable the above work to be resourced and delivered on an accelerated basis to enable the change needed to deliver Vision 2026 and the missional and financial flourishing of the Diocese of Blackburn.”

2. What is the Parish Renewal Programme and why do we need it?

To quote p41 of the Vision Implementation Plan:

“Exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19, a number of parishes in the diocese are facing declining financial health and/or missional strength with related entrenched challenges. These parishes will be considered for inclusion in a new Parish Renewal Programme which is an initiative to provide targeted non-financial assistance to selected parishes. Such assistance and planning will be linked with plans relating to

church planting, clergy/pioneer deployment and wider planning for the missional and financial flourishing of the Diocese of Blackburn."

Enabling those parishes which are struggling to be refreshed, renewed and to thrive again is an important task as we seek to grow healthy churches that transform communities across the whole of the diocese.

Primarily it is important missionally as we seek to ensure that in all corners of the diocese, people of all ages have access to inspiring worship and the sacraments and those without faith can hear the good news of Jesus and have an opportunity respond.

It is also important financially. As a diocese, despite the COVID-related challenges of 2020 we are blessed that 70% of parishes were able to contribute 95% or more of their parish share allocation last year. 85% of parishes were able contribute over 70%. However, 15% really struggled and many of these same parishes struggle year upon year resulting in a significant annual deficit in the diocesan accounts.

The vast majority of diocesan budgeted expenditure (84%) goes to pay for clergy-related costs such as stipends, vicarages, curates and training. As a diocese, under Vision 2026, we are firmly committed to maintaining existing levels of stipendiary ministry. The simple equation is that to fulfil this commitment to maintain clergy numbers, contribution of the full parish share budget is vital.

In the short-term, the annual deficit is being met by Diocese Board of Finance reserves as was approved by Diocesan Synod. However, reserves are finite¹ so in the long-term, the parish share budget needs to balance.

The primary course of action must be:

- Renewal in those parishes that are struggling.
- The broader MFF process, prayerfully and collaboratively discerning how and where to invest to reflect the changing demography of Lancashire.
- Encouraging generosity and enhancing levels of giving.

¹ In parallel to the MFF exercise, the Investment Committee continues to carefully monitor and review diocesan assets and investments such that returns continue to be used as far as is possible to enable parish ministry.

3. When other dioceses are cutting clergy, why is the Diocese of Blackburn committed to maintaining existing levels of stipendiary clergy?

As a diocese, we are passionate about the centrality of the Parish as the core unit of mission and ministry. We are also passionate about raising up lay leadership, equipping, empowering and releasing new lay leaders through the new 'Authorised

Lay Ministry' scheme for example and other initiatives under the Growing Leaders theme of Vision 2026.

Yet we prize highly the role of the ordained priest who:

- Can offer ministry and lead based on several years of theological training
- Can identify, train and mentor lay leaders
- Dedicate their daily lives to active ministry along with daily prayer for their communities
- Get to know local communities, taking opportunities to minister through occasional offices such as funerals, marriages and baptisms
- Offer the sacraments on a regular basis

Further, we note the evidence in the Church of England's 'Anecdote to Evidence' report which states:

"The strategy of grouping multiple churches together under one leader has in general had a detrimental effect on church growth. Multi-church amalgamations and teams are less likely to grow. Churches are more likely to grow when there is one leader for one community."

Looking at the age profile of clergy in the diocese, it is possible that up to a third may retire over the next five years. This is a further reason why now is a good time to be investing in maintaining a pipeline of highly motivated deacons and priests and to be prayerfully considering plans relating to leadership, deployment and church planting.

4. Is this exercise just focussed on Renewal Parishes?

No. It is also about identifying growing and thriving parishes that may be able to be equipped to support others. And it is also about conversations with those that are just about managing to consider what could help them to thrive and/or where local demographic changes precipitate a conversation around the shape of ministry, parish boundaries and church planting.

5. How will the exercise be resourced?

To support the work we have been successful in an application to the Church Commissioners Strategic Capacity Funding. This will enable us to set up a change unit whose whole purpose will be to enable healthy churches that transform

communities and renewal across our parishes. The funding will also enable us to offer support to Area Deans in their role in the MFF process.

The change unit will include:

- Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery, who will lead the team²
- A Senior Church Buildings Officer (DAC Secretary) who will help parishes find imaginative solutions to issues with church buildings³
- A Parish Renewal Lead who will work closely with parishes who have particular issues to address
- A part-time Pastoral Secretary who will advance pastoral schemes where these are necessary
- A Project Manager who will be managing the Lighting Up New Generations project as well as providing support to vision delivery and this new exercise

The Senior Church Buildings Officer, Parish Renewal Lead, Pastoral Secretary and Project Manager will all be recruited in Autumn/Winter 2021.

6. Why did the Strategic Capacity Funding money fund central posts?

Change within the Church of England is complex. Extensive consultation is rightly required before changes are made and processes relating to changes to buildings or parish boundaries for example, are time-consuming, detailed exercises. There is presently no way around change requiring central diocesan staff. The national church is working on simplifying processes and procedures through its ‘Transforming Effectiveness’ agenda, but the fruits of that are likely to be several years away.

Put simply, the Diocese of Blackburn is at risk of being so slim at the centre that whilst it can maintain business-as-usual it can’t change. That is fatal for any organisation. This is why the national church has generously funded additional central capacity meaning we can appoint a full-time Parish Renewal Lead, part-time Pastoral Secretary and some additional vision delivery support.

The Director of Vision Delivery role is already externally funded by grants from the Church Commissioners and the All Churches Trust.

The MFF process will identify the resources and change both ‘on the ground’ and centrally that are needed to enable the Diocese of Blackburn to flourish missionally

² The Director of Vision Delivery role is already primarily externally funded by grant funding from the Church Commissioners and All Churches Trust

³ This role is a re-configured DAC Secretary role, following the retirement of the previous postholder. This is a statutory diocesan role and is not externally funded

and financially, enabling Vision 2026. The Diocese of Blackburn can then apply to the Church Commissioners for a much larger grant under a different funding stream.

7. What's the process for the Missional and Financial Flourishing conversations?

The primary focus is on individual conversations with parishes. We will not be going down the route of deanery plans. This exercise is about conversations between our bishops, archdeacons, area deans and parish leaders to develop diocesan plans in relation to parish renewal, church planting, leadership and deployment as well as buildings development.

Initial conversations will take place with the Area Deans, Deanery Lay Chairs and Asst Area Deans to provide an over-arching framework for discussions. The Deanery Standing Committee will be briefed on the outcomes of those discussions. Beyond this, conversations will be with individual parish leaders with Area Deans continuing to be involved.

8. What will the outcome of the MFF exercise be?

The main outcome of the MFF Process is to enable the Aspirations of Vision 2026 to see Healthy Churches Transforming Communities across Lancashire that are Making Disciples, Being Witnesses, Growing Leaders and Inspiring Children and Young People with:

- Positive growth year on year in Diocesan RWA
- A balanced or surplus annual budget

9. I have a question, who do I contact?

Contact Carolyn, Director of Vision Delivery at
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