

DIOCESAN SYNOD

Title: **GROWING NEW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**
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I. INTRODUCTION

Last year the Diocese of Chelmsford was awarded £2m of Strategic Development Funding (SDF) by the Archbishops' Council to take forward new worshipping communities in four areas of significant housing growth in the diocese. These projects are now getting underway.

Our Bishop's Council is now thinking more broadly about this theme of Growing New Christian Communities – not just in areas of new housing. This Synod item shares the emerging thinking.

At its February meeting the Bishop's Council agreed to proceed with a stage 1 application for Strategic Development Funding (SDF) of c£3-3.5m to support a second wave of church planting and pioneering across Chelmsford Diocese. The bid will involve the initiation of new Christian communities across a diverse spectrum of contexts in Essex and East London.

The Council also agreed to make an application for “capacity funding” from the Church Commissioners recognising the increasing volume and complexity of diocesan change management activities and church planting projects. This application has been approved.

2. RATIONALE

Why consider a second wave of church planting?

Love: “The love of Christ compels us...” (2 Cor 5:14) to join in the work of building His kingdom, sharing the Good News of Jesus with those who are currently a long way from Faith and the church.

Transforming presence: we care deeply about our parishes and value the ministry already taking place. As we collectively seek to be a transforming presence in Essex and East London we want to grow new Christian communities.

Momentum: we want to build on the positive momentum which is gathering as we invest the first wave of SDF funding and as diocesan church plants begin to show initial signs of growth. God is at work and we want to join in.

Window of opportunity: “For a wide door for effective work has opened to me...” (1 Cor 16:9). Dialogue with the Church Commissioners has indicated an openness to consider a well framed proposal from Chelmsford Diocese.

3. A FURTHER SDF PROJECT

For this next SDF application we are proposing that funding of c£3-3.5m is sought in order to grow new Christian communities across Chelmsford Diocese.

Historically, an element of diocesan funding has been a core requirement for SDF applications. However, there is a recognition that with diocesan financial resources being under increasing pressure this is not always feasible. A plan has therefore been built which seeks to leverage diocesan investment in pioneering and church planting using existing resources (predominantly focusing some of our budgeted curacy placements) and prioritise investment of strategic funds in areas where this is not possible.

The SDF process takes some time. An initial application will be made in late April. If this is successful, more detailed work will be done over the summer, culminating in a second stage application in October and decisions in December.

The process to consider suitable opportunities for Growing New Christian Communities is starting and will involve local discussions. We hope to be looking at an eclectic mix of contexts and communities ranging from deeply urban to rural, rich to poor and ethnically homogenous to culturally diverse. Whilst the first church planting SDF bid was focused on areas of new housing, the proposed theme of the second bid is “Growing new Christian communities everywhere and for everyone.” We would hope that further applications might follow.

4. A WIDER VISION?

Growing new Christian Communities goes far wider than strategic development funding. The Synod presentation will share the developing thinking in this area and encourage further discussion.

5. CONCLUSION

Synod is invited to note and pray for this work.