

The Mustard Seed Strategy - Making disciples among people in poverty

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. (Matthew 13:31-32)

Overview

We are committed to seeing the body of Christ thrive in all of our communities. More than a quarter of the people of our Diocese live in the 49 parishes facing very high deprivation¹. In these places the proportion who attend a Church of England church is around half of that for the rest of the Diocese. There is outstanding ministry in many of those places, particularly in meeting needs, however we intend to become much more effective at making disciples who lead others to faith, seeing local expressions of worship take root and indigenous ministry flourish in those urban, coastal and rural communities.

There is an ambitious strategy across the diocese. Our 20s-40s initiative is investing £5m to plant 80 new worshipping communities by 2024 and a further 60 by 2029 alongside which existing parish ministry is being re-invigorated through our commitment to Leading Your Church into Growth. Those interventions include significant work in places of deprivation, but without a step change in missional capacity among people in poverty over the coming years the potential will not be realised. We do not want to disengage in that way, but are determined instead to invest in and celebrate a growing movement of missionary disciples and transformed communities.

We are therefore focusing this 'People in Poverty' strand of our strategy on three areas. The first two are the key interventions while the third is the primary outcome.

- I. Investing in groups of courageous local disciples through a twin track '**Stepping Up**' programme to identify, equip and mobilise witnesses, leaders, pastors and planters amongst people in poverty.
- II. Changing the culture of the diocese through a network of '**Ambassadors**' to catalyse a flow of partnership and generosity between parishes in prayer, energy and financial giving.
- III. As local people are developed, and a spreading network of support across the diocese established, we expect to see vibrant mission flourish. The Mustard Tree will grow many more "branches" in which the birds of the air will find a new home. We are referring to those branches as '**Community Hubs**'.

¹ Those that are ranked in the most deprived 10% nationally

The Stepping Up Programme - mobilising courageous disciples

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

It will be a movement of courageous ordinary people who spend time with Jesus that will make the difference in places of poverty. Many local people who come to faith in our deprived communities perceive themselves at best as *just* “unschooled ordinary people”. In reality they have huge potential as the experts on their own communities who already have a variety of gifts to offer, but who need additional support to step up and into their vocation.

The path that led to Peter and John stepping up was an apprenticeship in the presence of Jesus with encouragement and challenge, receiving and giving, learning and practical experience, failure and forgiveness, empowering and commissioning.

‘Stepping Up’ will be a transforming journey. An extended encounter with Jesus that will identify and develop gifts, give new perspectives and provoke courageous choices in a highly supportive environment.

Stepping Up will be a twin track programme run in strategically located Centres to develop Mission Apprentices and Community Ministers and will be robustly supported with individual mentoring.

Centres

We propose to develop around a dozen Centres in two phases. For the first phase, locations will be used where there are already signs of life and of sharing with other parishes. Initial investment is concentrated to achieve momentum for change, but with a clear plan to spread out to new places where potential is discerned and developed.

The proposal is to begin with three Centres, based in Hull, Middlesbrough and a coastal town. Nine further locations showing potential to be the second phase of Centres will be identified at an early stage, in time for inclusion in the implementation plans that will support a bid for Strategic Development Funding (SDF). They will include at least one rural Centre, a Centre in York and additional Centres in Hull, Middlesbrough and on the coast. Each Centre will itself be an example of excellence as a ‘Community Hub’ as described below.

Mission Apprentices

Each Centre will invest in groups of volunteers drawn from their own and other local parishes who have a desire to grow in confidence and effectiveness in mission. Being able to gather a viable group will be one indicator of a location being suitable as a Centre. These ‘Mission Apprentices’ will be people who are already involved in connections between church and local community. To support and develop that ongoing local ministry, they will take part in a two year development process called ‘Stepping Up’, built around gathering the group in a Centre for half a day each week. Each participant will also receive fortnightly mentoring. A 360° discovery tool will be used at the beginning of the process to inform the group and individual plans.

A Programme Leader will work with the Mission Apprentices and their parishes to identify opportunities for ongoing growth in practical ministry experience. Those who engage wholeheartedly and show most potential to mentor others will be given the opportunity to become Community Ministers.

Community Ministers

Community Ministers will take part in a more challenging two year development process called ‘Stepping Up Two’. While serving as emerging leaders with a commitment to local mission, usually in their own parish,

they will also work with the Programme Leader as one of the mentors for Mission Apprentices in their local Centre. They will be paid two days per week for the two years.

At the end of Stepping Up Two a Community Minister may continue in a voluntary capacity, be in a position to continue in a paid role with other funding or move on to something else. Opportunities will be available for participants who grow in confidence and mission competence. During the Stepping Up process we expect some to be involved in beginning a new worshipping community supported through the 20s-40s Growth Fund.

Mentoring

In addition to group input and practical experience, as part of their involvement in Stepping Up, each Mission Apprentice and Community Minister will have a personal mentor. The Mentors play a key accompanying role, providing prayerful and supportive encouragement. Mentors will be recruited both from the Centre and beyond, giving an opportunity for Ambassadors and committed Christians from other churches with appropriate experience, to exercise their discipleship. The ministry development of Community Ministers on Stepping Up Two will include enabling them to mentor one or more Mission Apprentice.

There will be a discernment process for mentors recognising that, however well intentioned, not everyone who volunteers will be appropriate, or understand the context. The Programme Leader will carry responsibility as a 'lead mentor' to coordinate and oversee their roles.

Ambassadors - Changing Diocesan Culture

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.
(Galatians 2:10)

Becoming a diocesan family that vibrantly reflects all of our urban, rural and coastal communities, including those in areas of deprivation will require a culture of mutuality so that in every parish we make it a priority to "remember the poor" and are all transformed by the work of the Spirit in and through our sisters and brothers in areas of significant deprivation.

The key intervention towards this culture change will be identifying individuals who have a "heart" for a community rooted in their own experience. For example, there are Christians whose vocation is lived out as a teacher, social worker or GP in a community experiencing deprivation, while living and worshipping elsewhere. They will be envisioned and equipped to become Mustard Seed Ambassadors to build partnerships between the two places. There are powerful stories of this already having happened and continuing. We believe many more would love to be the catalyst for a flourishing partnership between the parish they live and worship in and the parish they work in. We expect generosity of time, energy, prayer and resources to flow in both directions between partner parishes as they each play their part in God's work with the other. We see potential for this initiative to play a significant part in our diocese's work to embrace and implement 'Setting God's People Free'.

Individuals and parishes experiencing new shared life and fruitfulness through these partnerships will be invited to give to a **Mustard Seed Fund** which will help to provide the resources needed for this element of our strategy to continue, increase and spread over the long-term.

Community Hubs

As local people are identified, encouraged and equipped and a spreading network of support from other parishes is established we expect to see mission flourish at bases called 'Community Hubs'. These are the locations at which new people will be reached, disciples grown and new forms of worshipping community emerge. They are the new branches on the Mustard Tree in which the birds of the air find a new home. They will include both revitalised existing church groups and new worshipping communities.

In learning from the most effective work of this sort taking place in our Diocese and further afield it has been clear that local gathering places matter. The sense of being local is vital when developing people in discipleship as they see the connections between their faith and their day to day lives. Although each of these places must name themselves as best suits their community, collectively across the diocese we are referring to them as 'Community Hubs'.

Our working group includes members from Holy Trinity North Ormesby in Middlesbrough, St John's Rosmead in Hull and Westway Open Arms in Scarborough which are three examples of places around our diocese that are already functioning as Community Hubs. The strategy is to see those places grow in missional strength and to see many others established.

Community Hubs may be in the church building or another local venue, whichever best facilitates their ministry. More important than venue is a shared set of values and core ministry. Community Hubs are 'Wise' gathering places: **Welcoming**, **Involving**, **Supporting** and **Encountering**.

Welcoming all, extending hospitality, offering refreshments at affordable prices, in an accessible venue within the community they serve

Involving local people at every level with respect and mutuality

Supporting practically through listeners who assess needs, work in partnership with other local services and signpost help

Encountering Jesus and growing in discipleship through regular opportunities for prayer, worship and exploring faith

The progression from welcome through involvement and support to encounter with Jesus embodies best practice in holistic mission and evangelism strategy.²

Resources and Practicalities

1. Programme Leader and Associates

A highly able, experienced Programme Leader is essential. They will initially spend one day per week in each of the three first phase Centres overseeing the implementation in those locations and two days per week on wider diocesan communication and culture change. SDF, if awarded, will enable the appointment of three Associates Programme Leaders from late 2020. They will work with nine fledgling new Centres identified by the Programme Leader so that the initiative spreads rapidly across the diocese.

² See Evangelism Strategies by Bob and Mary Hopkins, Church in Every Context by Michael Moynagh

2. Financial support

It is possible that some initial seed capital will be required in order for a Community Hub to form, for example to make some basic improvements to venue facilities. We are assuming that such costs can be met by tapping into local sources of charitable funding or the Archbishop's Mission Fund, or a combination.

The progress made with Community Hubs, and the new expressions of the Body of Christ that form around them, will in many cases still be fragile at the point that a Community Minister completes the two year Stepping Up Two programme. As noted above, there is a range of possibilities for what happens at that point to secure and further develop the Hub. Continuing paid employment for a Community Minister should not be seen as a default, but may be appropriate in some places for a period.

3. Longer term development

Longer term roll-out of further Centres will be dependent on continuing the roles of the Team Leader and Associate Team Leaders. The new worshipping communities that develop in places of poverty are unlikely to generate sufficient income to sustain these overheads. In advance of the end of this 5-6 year programme the diocese will review the fruitfulness of this initiative and consider whether and how to budget for ongoing roles using the Common Fund and/or central Lower Income Communities funding. The Mustard Seed Fund is unlikely to be an appropriate mechanism to sustain these roles.

What 2025 Looks Like

a) Without Strategic Development Funding

There is a large and growing network of Mustard Seed Ambassadors fueling parish partnerships across the diocese with cross fertilization, generosity and mutual growth in discipleship. While targets will be set by the Programme Leader, the strategy doesn't depend on specific numbers of Ambassadors.

Through the first three Centres:

- Mission Apprentices: Thirty six completed Stepping Up and are engaged and effective local leaders in mission with involvement in new worshipping communities and other local mission initiatives.
- Community Ministers: Eight completed Stepping Up Two and are experienced mentors in local mission.

b) With Strategic Development Funding

- There are nine additional Centres in place by early 2021 making twelve Centres in total.
- Mission Apprentices: A further 81 completed Stepping Up and are engaged and effective local leaders in mission with involvement in new worshipping communities and other local mission initiatives.
- Community Ministers: A further 18 completed Stepping Up Two and are experienced mentors in local mission.

Taking into account the realities of life in deprived communities, these numbers assume a third of participants need to step back, move away or drop out during each of the two year Stepping Up processes.

Roll Out

- 2019: Recruit Programme Leader for Jan 2020. Procure any specialist input to develop Stepping Up.
- December 2019 – expect invitation from Strategic Investment Board to proceed to second stage of SDF award process
- 2020: First group of Apprentices begin Stepping Up in January. First 6 months of Stepping Up enable us to identify the first Community Ministers to start Stepping Up Two in Sept.
- Around June 2020 – final decision from Strategic Investment Board to award SDF funding.
- 2021: Stepping Up and Community Ministers second groups. With SDF, 3 Associate Programme Leaders in place.
- 2022-2023 Further groups of Apprentices and Community Ministers begin on an annual cycle in the Centres

Costs

In building a case for Strategic Development Funding (SDF) our aim is to be consistent with our successful 20s-40s bid. The underlying principle was that the Diocese would fund infrastructure and overheads, and would seek SDF to cover front-line interventions.

A similar approach for this People in Poverty proposal leads to a requirement for c. £500k of Diocesan funding, in line with previous estimates, to be spent on

£360k – ‘Stepping up’ Programme leader remuneration and expenses

£ 15k – ‘Stepping up’ development

£125k – 50% employment costs of Director of Making & Nurturing Disciples, as envisaged when 20s-40s was approved.

The scheme by which we will release funds to support this is being developed in detail, but we are confident that the Diocese can support this level of investment without any unforeseen adverse impact.

A further c. £1.35m SDF will be spent on

£725k – 3 x Associate Programme Leader remuneration and expenses for c. 5 years

£120k – ‘Stepping up’ running costs

£480k – Community Minister remuneration

£ 25k – Monitoring and research costs

We have also considered a scenario where our application for SDF is not successful. We trust that this is unlikely, not least because the focus of the People in Poverty work is in line with national church priorities. However we are determined in any event to make a difference in places of poverty so we have established that we could achieve a worthwhile, albeit smaller scale, impact using Diocesan funding alone – as set out in the ‘What 2025 Looks Like’ section. In this event the Diocese would need to find an additional £150k to fund ‘Stepping up’ running costs and Community Ministers’ remuneration to enable this smaller scale implementation, realising the benefit of the time and effort that would already have been invested. It isn’t clear what the source of this additional funding would be, but a worst case scenario is that we would have to save 3 years of one ministry post over the duration of the programme.

Revd Richard White

April 2019