Diocese of Hereford

Proclaiming Christ ✦ Growing Disciples

DIOCESAN PROFILE



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CHRIST-LIKE

Diocese of Hereford

Proclaiming Christ + Growing Disciples

ENGAGED

PRAYERFUL

At the heart of our diocese lies three core values through which our life together flows and by which we live out our values in every church, home, school and community across our diocese.

CONTRACTS & OPPORTUNITIES

A deeply rural diocese	YET	the population still largely identifies as Christian* and a diocese where life events held in the local church remain an important to local family tradition
(2021 Census data indicated that in many of the rural towns and villages of our diocese well over half an in some instances over 75% of the population identified as holding religious affiliation marked Christian)		
Smallest diocesan population and fewest number of churchgoers	YET	Amongst the fastest growth in new worship communities.
250 churches have fewer than 15 regular attendees	YET	33% of the diocese live in 10 parishes; 20% live in Hereford city.
Oldest age profile and significant exodus of young adults seeking opportunities beyond the diocese	YET	the intergenerational mission project has grown an engaged and expanding learning community.
Lowest levels of planned giving and least amount of income	YET	Fastest take-up of Parish Giving Scheme with over 80% of churches signed up.
Fewest stipendiary ministers	YET	Highest ratio of clergy per person.
By far the highest ratio of church buildings per person	YET	National reputation for making the best use of church buildings.
Large number of rural schools	YET	Strong Ofsted & SIAMS performances



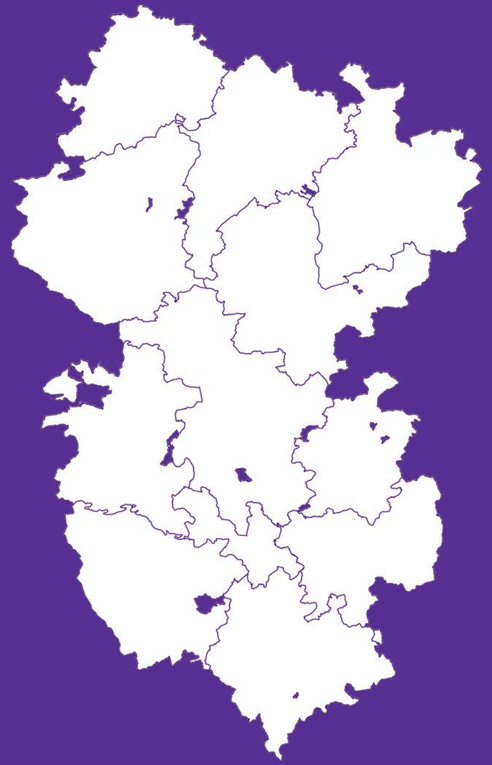
KEY FACTS

86 Benefices

12 Deaneries

78 Church of England schools

1,650 square miles



407 Churches

90% of churches either Grade 1 or Grade 2 listed buildings of historical importance

344 Parishes

PRAYERFUL

CHRISTLIKE

ENGAGED

STRATEGIC PLAN

We seek to be Prayerful, Christ-like and engaged in the way we live out our everyday faith as Christians across the churches, villages and towns of our diocese.

Our values are at the heart of everything we do, and our strategy is about creating a framework to enable the local church to flourish recognising that there are some things that will need to be encouraged centrally due to a lack of existing capacity or resources locally.

> Our vision as a diocese is to see more **people proclaim Christ and to grow new disciples.**



OUR FIVE PRIORITIES

1. (FAITH/DISCIPLESHIP): Welcoming new disciples and encouraging deeper faith in all.
2. LEADERSHIP/TEAMS: Expanding the number of clergy and lay leaders and supporting and equipping them.
3. YOUTH/INTERGENERATIONAL MISSION: Growing a younger congregational profile.
4. FINANCE: Sustainable finance through generous giving and asset management.
5. BUILDINGS A clear future for every church building.

> What we expect to see by 2030 is a **transformation of our diocese**

We will know we have been successful when we have:

- Doubled the number of young people attending worship in our churches regularly from 500 to 1000.
- Established 50 New Worshipping Communities, with 25 focused on young people and children (including Flourish Worshipping Communities).
- We hope to see more than 50 of our 86 benefices with at least one congregation with an average weekly Sunday attendance of over 50 people in rural areas and over 100 people attending in our market towns.
- We want to see more than 3% of the population (9,500) attending regular worship in our churches.
- We will equip and support lay and ordained leaders enabling a Christian presence in every community which includes 200+ new voluntary lay leaders.

OUR JOURNEY 2016 - 2022

We continue to pray for God's blessing on our work and to see His Kingdom come here in our Diocese.



2016

- £500k deficit
- Parish offer introduced
- Vision but no overall strategy
- Siloed culture in central diocese
- Complicated governance



2017

Process of change began

- Governance review
- New approach to assets
- Services in house (surveyor)
- People strategy
- Diocesan Mission Action Plan
- Deanery leadership teams commissioned



2018 2019

Changes continued:

- Education & MAT overhaul
- Introduced giving advisors & signed up to parish giving scheme
- New Communications strategy and social media engagement
- Bishop's Council overhaul
- Introducing Total Return
- £750k central costs removed
- Significant land and property deals
- Closure of Ludlow Office & staff reduction
- Intergenerational mission project starts
- Balanced budget approve



2020 2021

- Covid slowed us down
- Offer and attendance drops in churches due to Covid
- New Bishop and senior team
- Period of listening
- Church steps up social action in Covid





2022

New strategy approved

- Intergenerational mission project signed off
- Faith New Deal funding secured
- Support for refugees and Ukraine
- Significant asset development leading to lots of investment projects
- Local Ministry roles introduced

But:

- Deanery leadership teams not working
- Lots of parish vacancies









Our diocese maps onto an ancient Mercian kingdom, now covering Herefordshire, south Shropshire, part of Worcestershire, and some parishes across the Welsh border who stayed in the Church of England after the formation of the Church in Wales. This makes for a glorious mix of history, landscape and culture, with farming, food and hospitality as common threads alongside a rich history of faith and prayer.

Shropshire, in the north of the Diocese, boasts many significant and historic towns alongside beautiful and sometimes remote villages. There's Ludlow, the town John Betjeman called one of the loveliest in England, which was the capital of the Welsh Marches where heirs to the throne were historically sent to learn how to govern. Bridgnorth played a significant part in the English Civil War. Bishops Castle and Church Stretton regularly feature in lists of the best places to live in Britain, and Ironbridge was the crucible of the Industrial Revolution.

Spiritually, the Saxon princess St Milburga was an abbess of Wenlock in the 7th century who presided over the community of monks and nuns there, leading the evangelisation and pastoral care of south Shropshire.

That legacy lives on in the churches of the Ludlow Archdeaconry who continue the work of sharing the love of God in word and deed from the tiniest hamlet deep in the hills to the southern parts of Telford and everywhere in between.

SHROPSHIRE



"The nearest earthly place to paradise"
PG Wodehouse, on Shropshire

“The most lovely graces of nature are here combined”
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

HEREFORDSHIRE



Hereford itself is a city physically dominated by our cathedral. The Bishop’s Palace, magnificent with its beautiful gardens running down to the River Wye, is the oldest continually inhabited domestic building in England and home to the diocesan office.

Nearly 55,000 people live in Hereford, and it serves mainly as the main trading centre for surrounding towns and villages. The city has undergone considerable changes in its physical infrastructure and appearance in recent years and like the rest of our diocese is a friendly and welcoming place.

Hereford Cathedral plays a vital part in the life of our diocese. As the seat of the bishop, it seeks to provide prayerful support and companionship.

It is the scene of many of the great occasions in the life of our diocese, it seeks to welcome all who are on a journey of Christian faith.

The Cathedral plays a complementary role in discipleship education and is able to promote a range of courses that speak to a wide audience. With its long and historic musical tradition and its liturgical worship, it is able to provide a particular focus for our diocese and enjoys sharing its traditions with others. Links with parishes are of great importance, and over the years there have been different programmes of engagement, all focusing on the cathedral’s ministry of welcome and hospitality.









OUR DIOCESE

We are blessed to be in such a beautiful part of the country, where produce is grown, and livestock reared.

We are also home to some internationally renowned brands (Tyrrells, Bulmers, Heineken, Avara and Westons Cider) and many small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, tourism is an essential part of our local economies.

However, holidaymakers do not dominate, as accommodation and attractions are spread across a wide geographical area. Our diocese often has a lasting impact, and many past visitors return to settle here during retirement.

We have strong connections to the military in the diocese, and we are supporters of the Armed Forces Covenant.







Church Culture

There's something very special about the Diocese of Hereford. God is clearly at work in our parishes. Congregations may often be very small, but they are deeply embedded in their contexts and draw on the support of people of goodwill in the parishes.

Rural isolation is a reality, with the challenges that brings, but the church is often at the forefront of initiatives to bring people together – all in the name of Jesus. We live out the paradox that places and people who seem small, hidden, and lonely are often the places where God is at work. We show that doing the 'old things' well alongside new initiatives is a key to growth, and that patient endurance over the long term often bears fruit.

Above all, the churches in our diocese are rather good at 'getting on with it.'

We are proud that we are usually able to disagree well with one another, not allowing our differences to intrude on our three core values and our desire to be people who seek faithfully to love our God and one another and to proclaim the good news of Christ not just in our words but also in our actions towards those in our communities.



1994 first women priests at Hereford Cathedral



2024

Church Tradition & Theology

There are no parishes receiving alternative episcopal oversight in our diocese. We have consistently had one of the highest percentages of women as incumbents since the ordination of women as priests in 1994 (currently 33%), and our Diocesan Synod overwhelmingly carried the motion enabling the consecration of women to the episcopate.

Ecumenical relationships are developing across our diocese, in worship and witness. Several parishes join with ecumenical neighbours for services, in a way that enriches and sustains a wider worshipping community. In some places clergy from different denominations meet regularly and informally to pray together as well in more formal Churches Together structures, and Hereford Cathedral hosts a monthly 'City Praise' where Christians from all denominations come together. We have ecumenical mission and social care partnerships with Borderlands Agricultural Chaplains, LEAF in Ledbury working in schools and GP practices, and others.

> The structure of ministry in our diocese reflects many years of adaptation upon the traditional parish structure, with the underlying medieval foundations still remaining surprisingly intact in many respects.



Ministry

As a diocese, we're committed to helping both volunteer and ordained ministers lead our parishes. Many of our parishes are grouped together in rural areas. Recent feedback shows our clergy are generally happy with their work, and they really appreciate the support program we offer when they start new positions. We're also testing out independent counselling services for clergy and helping senior clergy become better mentors to their trainees.

We encourage our priests to work closely with teams of volunteers and other ministers, especially those focused on young people. We believe strongly in teamwork, so we've made our training programmes consistent for both volunteers and ordained ministers. Our new "Leading Your Church into Growth" (LYCiG) programme helps senior clergy work with their teams to serve their local communities better.

As we plan for the future, we're focusing on volunteer ministry through Local Ministry roles. These allow people to take on specific jobs like leading worship, visiting parishioners, or doing outreach work. This way, more people can share in the ministry. Some volunteers called Local Ministers (LLM) take on all three roles after completing a one-year introductory course (ICM programme). We've also shortened the training for our Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) to just two years, and we've recently created a new role for Licensed Lay Funeral Ministers.

One great benefit of training volunteers and ordained ministers together through our local training centre Cuddesdon Gloucester and Hereford (CGH) has been watching people discover their calling as part of a supportive community. This means we have both volunteers and clergy who understand our local area and respect each other. We continue building on this by offering integrated training and support tailored to different types of ministers.

One of our most exciting recent developments has been our focus on mission and ministry that engages all ages, especially young people. National funding helped us learn from our intergenerational (IM) project and create a vision for reaching young people, children, and families through our Youth Hubs Project (YH). While this is based in specific locations, it benefits the whole diocese through training and support. We're also investing in new positions like Secondary School Chaplains, an Ordained Pioneer, and Rural Church Missioners (RCM) — these are parish priests who also help churches in their wider area think about outreach and mission. With all these initiatives working together, Hereford is an exciting place right now for anyone involved in church mission and ministry.



Deployment of clergy & resources

Our resources and people are spread thinly across a wide rural geography, and we have numerous multi-parish benefices of between 6 and 12 churches apiece.

In recent years we have taken steps to look at the way we deploy clergy recognising that for effective ministry to flourish we need to carefully look at the size of the population and financial position of churches. Change can be slow to evolve but our investment in central resources to support mission is slowly evolving and people are keen to adjust when they see the benefits.





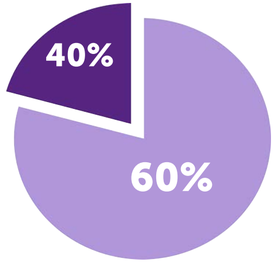






Finance

The Hereford Diocesan Board of Finance ('DBF') is the charitable company which holds the financial assets of the Diocese of Hereford. The purpose of the charity is to promote, assist and advance the work of the Church of England across the 400 churches in our Diocese. We do this by paying and housing the clergy, training future clergy, and providing a range of services for parishes and church schools.

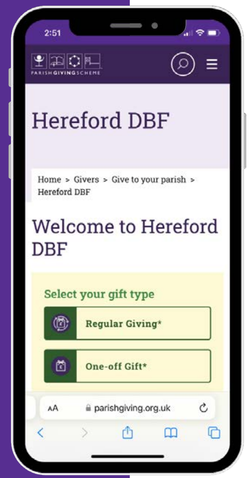


The work of the Finance Committee is supplemented by a group overseeing the land and property portfolio, with the help of professional glebe agents, and the Investment Advisory Group monitors balance sheet allocation and investment performance. Together these different groups strive to deploy the DBF's resources wisely to support the life and mission of our parish churches.

The primary source of the DBF's income comes from the generosity of every church through Parish Offer to a Common Fund for ministry and mission. Parish contributions have declined over many years, and now represent around 55% of total DBF income, or approx. 60% of parish ministry costs. In addition, the DBF generates investment income from historic glebe and listed investments, and rental income from any vacant properties.

The majority of the DBF's expenditure is on the clergy who serve our parishes. The cost of providing ministry across the diocese represents approximately 77% of total expenditure. This includes stipends, national insurance, pension contributions, housing, council tax and water rates, and the costs of training current and future clergy. The remaining expenditure is on parish support services such as safeguarding, advice on church buildings, supporting church schools, clergy development, payment of removal and resettlement grants, as well as a contribution to the national Church.

The Diocese's portfolio of glebe land, clergy properties, and investments currently enables the DBF to fund around 40% of parish mission and ministry costs. However, this substantial level of DBF support has resulted in significant operating deficits for several years, and this is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term.



National Church investment has helped fund two Parish Giving Advisers to support our churches as they seek to encourage a culture of generosity and welcome, and to embed digital giving technology making it easier for visitors to choose how they donate. Planned, regular donations are vital to the financial health of our local churches, and the Parish Giving Scheme is especially helpful in reducing local administration and facilitating annual increases in donation levels to keep pace with rising costs. Significant challenges remain for our rural churches in building sustainable finances, where typically Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) rely on small congregations whose collective ability to increase their giving may be limited.

While Parish Offer provides the largest source of DBF income, trustees seek to optimise the financial returns from each balance sheet asset class. While the DBF's overall net asset figure of around £90m appears healthy, the level of free reserves only just covers four months' operating expenditure. Over 70% of balance sheet assets are restricted in the form of glebe land (8%) and parsonages and other property (~65%), as are most of the listed fixed asset investments (~25%).

DBF trustees monitor strategic risks, maintain a robust financial control environment to safeguard assets, and review performance via regular management accounts and key indicators. The Board implemented total return accounting for its Diocesan Stipends (endowment) Fund in 2019, which enables trustees to allocate additional resources for clergy stipends most years.

The diocesan Finance Team and Parish Giving Advisers provide support for clergy and PCC officers.

Financial information is now thorough and timely, and financial control is judged to be good.



BUILDINGS

We have created a nationally celebrated model of care and creative use of our buildings. Our ancient churches are much loved and well-tended by their communities; they often provide the only cohesive spiritual and social focus for our villages. Place is a significant feature of rural life, with a strong sense of ownership of the church building even if people rarely attend.

For many people in our parishes, belief in God is still part of the underlying pattern of life even if they are not regular worshippers. Many comment that they encounter God through a sense of awe that they feel when they enter our church buildings. Our diocesan strategy seeks to capture that engagement with our buildings, which have been places of worship and prayer for centuries, and enable tourists to become visitors, visitors to become pilgrims, and pilgrims to become lifelong disciples. We also want to work with others to strengthen the sustainability of our churches over the long term.

The focus on achieving Carbon net zero by 2030 is a significant challenge with over 400 church buildings where nearly 90% are either grade I or grade II listed status. Since the global pandemic our rural communities are more fragile and many are struggling to maintain their buildings.

In this context, unexpected and costly repairs can have a disproportionate impact on the ability of parishes to fund the mission and ministry of the local church and diocese, and can raise questions about the future viability of church life. We have to balance the opportunities for mission and ministry with how we maintain buildings as significant listed places of worship.







Our diocese is a wonderful place to bring up a family, and our diverse schools, from the largest in Hereford, to the smallest in the Shropshire hills, are filled with dedicated teachers and education professionals who go the extra mile for the good of their communities, their children and young people.

Education

Most Ofsted and SIAMS inspections judge our schools to be good or better. We have 193 schools in the Diocese of Hereford, teaching approximately 47,000 children and young people. Of these, 78 are Church of England schools, 3 are secondary and 75 primaries. 40% of our primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils and of course play crucial roles in serving rural communities within the diocese. Approximately 12,000 children attend our Church of England schools; there are currently more pupils in our Church of England schools than regular attendees at Sunday services in the diocese.

We have a variety of school types, including those which remain maintained, single academy trusts and those who are part of multi-academy trusts. We work in partnership with 4 local authorities: Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire. The Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust has grown in recent years and is now a flourishing family of 16 Church of England







schools. In line with national expectation, the diocese has a clear Academisation Strategy, and two new multi-academy trusts are currently in formation.

The work in every Church of England school around the diocese is underpinned and driven by a theologically rooted Christian vision that enables all members of the community to flourish, in line with the Church of England vision for education. Our schools are inclusive places that provide opportunities for spiritual growth; our strategy continues to place a clear focus on building strong connections between everyday faith, school, home and the local church.

Partnership between church and school is a key part of Christian life within our schools. This is significant in a number of ways, including supporting church growth, prompting experimentation in styles of worship and fellowship and promoting engagement of the whole community.

The Diocese of Hereford is also home to the newest university (NMITE) in the country, which welcomed its first students in September 2020, in the middle of Covid. This impressive facility is growing steadily, offering a unique approach to further education whilst offering a great resource to the wider community.

Safeguarding

Good safeguarding practice is at the heart of our mission. We uphold the policies and practice for Safeguarding within the Church of England across every one of our churches and schools. We want to ensure they are adopted and implemented across every part of the Church so it can be a safe place for everyone.

In our diocese, we are committed to putting things right when they go wrong. We put survivors first, strive to care for any who have been harmed and follow the best possible practice. We work with all statutory and other authorities to deal effectively with any disclosures of harm, contemporary or historic. We seek to learn the lessons from every situation to make our churches and schools a safer place for all. A good culture of safeguarding is essential in all we do.



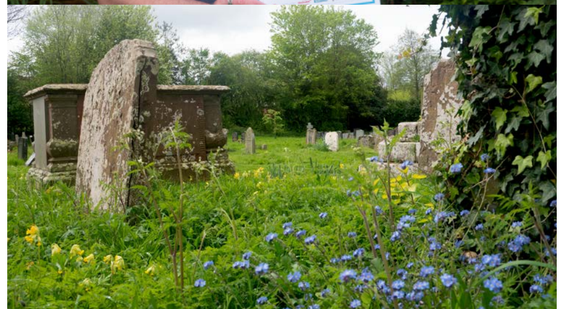


Net zero & Eco matters

We began our journey in 2019 and have continued to push forward developing our policies and made strategic investment in resources in order to become carbon net zero by 2030. On 2025 we achieved our silver award as an Eco diocese. Travelling around our diocese is already challenging and expensive, public transport outside the urban areas is almost non-existent, fuel is expensive in rural areas, and we do not currently have the infrastructure to support the wide use of electric cars. That said, environmental issues are at the forefront of the minds of many of our younger generations and we have an opportunity to demonstrate that Christian communities within our diocese are leading change rather than reacting to it.








Photocredit : SPSJ

Racial Justice

Our commitment to seeking a fairer more just community is embedded in the relationships we have developed in recent years, working closely with the county council to support Ukrainians and other refugee communities as well as building our understanding of matters of racial justice.

As we look to the future, we seek to build a fairer more just community which is embedded in the relationships we develop in our churches and schools, where people of every race, ethnicity, and cultural background can flourish as valued members of our community, finding their gifts recognised, their voices heard, and their contributions celebrated. We are actively working to address systemic inequalities within our structures, ensuring that opportunities for ministry, leadership, and service are genuinely accessible to all, and fostering an environment where diversity is not simply tolerated but embraced as a reflection of God's abundant love.








Photocredit : SPSJ

In the 14th century, babies in Herefordshire were baptised in cider.

Festival & Culture

There is a wide variety of specialist events from the prestigious Three Choirs and Haydn festivals to the Hereford, Ludlow and Leominster May Fair to the renowned Ludlow Food Festival and more recent creation of the Ledbury Poetry Festival, to various rock and pop gatherings, and to the many cider, beer and microbrewery festivals across our diocese this is a place that celebrates the joys of life in our many communities.

From the past to the present, language and landscape have intertwined. George Herbert's 'A Priest to the Temple' has both inspired and intimidated rural clergy since it first suggested that "the things of ordinary use" could be made "to serve for lights even of Heavenly Truths".

Housman hymned the landscape, Elgar dreamt the landscape into music, and its beauty was the England (and Wales) from which Wilfred Owen went to war. The modern Olympics began, as all know, in Much Wenlock. There are castles everywhere - Cleobury Mortimer, with a population now of 3,000 - had two.

Over the centuries this has been disputed land in complex ways, and perhaps the memory of that still shapes some of our culture and thinking.









OUR FUTURE

We pray that we will see our churches flourish and this goes beyond well-attended Sunday mornings to the core of every day faith that is lived out by those who live, work and study in our schools, communities and places of worship and work. We seek to model our behaviours of prayer, Christlikeness and engagement so that those around us come to understand the transformation of a life built on the foundation of Christ.

We recognise the need to support our clergy and to build up our lay leaders so that we release people for mission in our communities.

It is perhaps a paradox that this seemingly conservative Diocese may in fact become a crucible for forging new patterns of ministry for the national church. We are a small organisation and can evolve quickly. Also, we are unlike any other diocese in England, but most dioceses have places within them that resemble us. Therefore, we can provide a culture of excellence that is a resource upon which the whole Church of England can draw.

Diocese of
Hereford
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The Diocsean Office, The Palace, Hereford, HR4 9BL
t: 01432 373300 e:info@hereford.anglican.org www.hereford.anglican.org