



Common Fund Request

Dear friends,

As we write to you, we have much to celebrate here in the Diocese of Sheffield. Statistics for Mission data indicates that across almost all age groups average weekly attendance is growing in line with, or exceeding, national averages. Figures show that average weekly attendance at Church of England services rose by almost 5% in 2023, and by children by nearly 6%. In our Diocese, average adult weekly attendance grew by 7% and usual Sunday attendance (both adult and child) grew by 6%. This is not yet a trend and some of this is likely 'post-pandemic bounce-back'; but the fact that our own statistics reflect the national pattern does add credibility to the data.

We continue to attract exceptional leaders, both lay and ordained, across many contexts within the Diocese. We continue to work within our communities with numerous examples of outreach work providing a lifeline to those that we serve.

However, significant financial challenges remain. As we continue to work through these and to implement our strategy, the Diocesan Synod approved a deficit budget of £2.1 million for 2024, calling once again on our limited general reserves. We anticipate needing to set a deficit budget again in 2025 but would hope that to be lower through securing additional funds from national church and from increasing Common Fund contributions. If we are successful in securing this funding, we need to match the generosity with generosity. Therefore, we are asking you, if at all possible, to aim to increase your pledge on last year.

We know financial challenges are felt across our parishes. We are still seeing the impact of COVID, cost of living crisis, high inflation, and the significant increases in energy costs. We know this has changed the structure of our congregations, local giving, the cost of running buildings, and access to external funding. We also acknowledge the ongoing uncertainty around Prayers of Love and Faith.

You will be aware that over the last year we have been completing a Strategy Refresh exercise across the Diocese. You have been invited to participate through Deanery Days, workshops and individual feedback. As we collate this and prepare to shape our strategy for the next decade, we remain committed to the vision of the Diocese of Sheffield and excited at the possibilities where we see God at work in our churches, schools, chaplaincies and our communities.

We will be submitting a funding request in February 2025 to the national Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board in support of our strategy. This is an opportunity to continue our partnership with the national church to access further funding which will directly benefit our mission areas, our leaders (both lay and ordained) and the communities we serve. It will include a request for some additional clergy posts, grafting teams, mission area support posts, and ongoing investment in our curate pipeline. If successful, 98% of the funds will be spent on direct ministry costs or supporting mission across our Mission Areas.

As part of this process we need to show our pathway to financial sustainability for the Diocese as well as demonstrating the ongoing impact from the additional investment.

Common Fund receipts are a critical part of this. Receipts in 2023 were £3.4 million. This represents a reduction in cash terms since 2019 of £0.8 million. Across the Diocese there are currently fewer than 20 contributors which meet the full costs of local ministry and an even smaller number that provide an additional contribution into Common Fund. This means that around 90% of the parishes across the Diocese receive financial support from the Diocesan Board of Finance or through National Church grants such as Lowest Income Communities Funding. You can see more information on the breakdown of costs in the infographic accompanying this letter.

As your PCC completes your budget and planning process for 2025 and make your Common Fund Pledge we ask you to consider carefully and prayerfully what you are able to invest. This is investment in your local leadership, local Mission Area, and local communities; and whether you are able to support other Parishes through this arrangement. To continue to benefit from national funding we need to show that we are committed to our local mission plans through local investment. Or, to put it simply, meeting generosity with generosity.

We have prepared a number of resources to support you as you consider your pledge, these are available on our website. Our Mission Area Support Team will be more than happy to support you on this journey. We have once again included an opportunity to make a provisional pledge where you may not feel able at this stage to make a full pledge. To help the Diocesan Board of Finance approve budgets for 2025 when we meet in November, we would ask for your pledge by 25 October 2024. The supporting resources, contact details and pledge form are available on our website: sheffdio.org/common-fund.

We thank you for all you are doing to spread the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the ways in which you serve your local communities on a daily basis both in times of challenge and in times of celebration. Please do get in touch if there are any ways in which we can support you at this time or in the coming months.

With gratitude and every blessing,

+ Pete Sheffield

+ Sophie Doncaster

The Rt Revd Pete Wilcox,
Bishop of Sheffield

The Rt Revd Sophie Jelley,
Bishop of Doncaster



Katie Bell, Diocesan Secretary &
CEO to the Sheffield Diocesan Board of Finance