



# Closer to Christ Campaign

## Impact Report



April 2026

My dearest parishioners

Many of you know of my passion and commitment to our Mission as a Diocese is to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ through His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Now more than ever there is a necessity for us to reach out to those who are spiritually adrift, to share the Good News of the Gospel, so they can find a way to salvation.

We have a duty to contribute to the development of the Diocese and our parishes for the future. It is an undertaking that can be accomplished only by our faithfulness and generosity at a moment in history when we might be tempted to become absorbed with our own problems and difficulties. Pope Leo XIV, in his first public remarks, calls the Church to be a 'missionary Church' and to 'without fear, proclaim the Gospel, to be missionaries.' We want to bring people closer to Jesus in every aspect of our work. We want to teach people about Him, to connect people with communities and parishes focused on Him, and to reach out to those who have never heard about Him.

To help achieve this, five years ago we embarked on the Closer to Christ Campaign, a bold and exciting initiative in response to the demands facing us as a Diocese, which were identified through close consultation with clergy and laity alike. These two key priorities, which will help us to realise our aims, are:

- Providing for Clergy, ensuring men are attracted to the seminary, priests are sustained in ministry, and our clergy are cared for in sickness and retirement, with practical support.
- Reviving Local Parish Communities, enabling parishes to become financially sound and adequately resourced to enable the laity, supported by clergy, to maximise the impact of the local parish vision.

**More than 3,000 of you have answered our call and already contributed nearly £11 million to the Campaign. I want to express my heartfelt thanks for your kindness and generosity.**

Now, as we approach the final stages of the Campaign, we can see how it has provided an occasion not only to meet some of the urgent requirements of the present but to leave a lasting impact for generations still to come. This report celebrates the many benefits that our parishioners' donations have made towards realising our aims. Once again, thank you very much.

In Corde Iesu,

Bishop of Portsmouth



# Financial Overview

## of the Closer to Christ Campaign

The Closer to Christ Campaign is an extraordinary undertaking that has and continues to benefit the Diocese by building upon the diocesan mission of supporting individuals in practicing and deepening their faith in Jesus Christ. It provides much-needed resources to fund seminarians in formation for priesthood, provide for the ongoing formation and care for priests in active ministry and into retirement, and helps parishes to secure necessary resources to thrive in the future.

### Financial summary of the Closer to Christ Campaign as of February 2026



**3,311**

**Total pledges received**



**79**

**Parishes participating**



**£10.9 Million**

**Total Pledged**



**£7.7 Million**

**Total received to date (Feb 26)\***



**£2.2 Million**

**Total distributed to parishes to date (Feb 26)**



**£1.4 Million**

**Total distributed towards supporting clergy in ministry to date (Feb 26)**



**£1.4 Million**

**Total distributed for supporting seminarians**



**£1.2 Million**

**Total received by the Priests' Retirement Fund to date (Feb 26)**

\*Includes payment to CCS which was taken from the portions allotted to our seminarians, active clergy and retired priests; **not** from the amount allotted to our parishes

# Parish Spotlight: St Boniface, Southampton

St Boniface in the heart of Southampton is one parish that has made major improvements to both the church and the parish hall over the past year, all supported by the parish's share of funds from the Closer to Christ Campaign.

Improvements to the church include upgraded lighting after a specialist assessment revealed that the previous levels were far below what is required for comfortable reading.

"The new system provides significantly improved illumination while using less electricity," says Fr Tom Kleinschmidt, the parish priest, "while a new sound system has enhanced audio quality during services."

The Closer to Christ campaign funds also met half the costs of replacing a damaged carpet after an arson attack in 2024, with insurance meeting the other half.

The campaign also funded additional doors for the parish hall that replaced a brick wall and opened the space directly into the garden, allowing far more natural light to enter. Vehicle protection barriers have been installed to protect the church, and new floor lighting has been installed at the front of St Boniface to improve visibility and safety. Future plans include refurbishing the hall bathrooms, updating the kitchen, and installing a dedicated sound system.

Improvements to the Margaret Clitherow Room included installing a new kitchen and creating a dedicated storage area. Adding a new accessible toilet has also improved access for all visitors.



# Supporting our Seminarians

The Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth is blessed to have 10 men in formation for the priesthood. Seminarian formation takes between six to eight years at a cost of approximately £30,000 each year. We rely on the prayers and generosity of people like you to support the formation for our future priests.



Time in seminary involves pastoral formation, human formation, spiritual formation and intellectual formation.

- Pastoral formation prepares seminarians for the realities of parish life and ministry through both theoretical study and practical placement experience.
- Human formation involves helping a seminarian to become the best version of himself.
- Spiritual formation aims to help seminarians cultivate a lifelong habit of deep communion with Jesus Christ, continually seeking a personal and enduring friendship with Him.
- Through intellectual formation, seminarians are introduced to the Church's tradition and supported in developing a deeper knowledge and love of the mystery of faith.

## REFLECTION FROM ADAM TRZEBIŃSKI

This year, I have begun my theological studies, which I find deeply enjoyable and enlightening. My pastoral placement is at the "Open House" organised by St Patrick's Church in Soho. Open House welcomes those experiencing homelessness in London; it is exactly what it sounds like. They open their church hall to those in need, providing a space to relax, eat great food, share good company, and be restored. I serve there on Tuesdays, offering whatever help is required, engaging with guests, and providing spiritual reflections and prayers at the end of the evening. I am thoroughly enjoying the placement and look forward to continuing this good work.

Apart from my placement, daily horarium, and studies, I have also been appointed Head Sacristan at the seminary. So far, it has proved to be a rewarding "house job" involving significant responsibility, including acting as the team leader for the year in the sacristy

While the work is not particularly difficult, it requires a substantial amount of time. This helps me not only to improve my time management but also to appreciate the small, hidden tasks that priests and volunteers perform in the Church. Through my work in various parishes and my formation at Allen Hall, I have come to view sacristy work as a formative mission. The role of the sacristan is illuminated by the principles of service and reverence for the sacred. By preparing the space, we enable the holy work of others, and in doing so, we participate in that holiness ourselves. Ultimately, sacristy work is a mission of love, ensuring that the physical space honours the divine mystery celebrated at the altar.

Adam is in his fourth year of seminary



## REFLECTION FROM FRANCIS EZEANI

As I continue my 5th year of seminary formation, I am struck again with the many wonderful opportunities that I have been presented with here in the seminary. The highlight for me was the opportunity to visit Italy for the first time ever in the summer for the seminary annual retreat and pilgrimage for the Jubilee of Seminarians! I remember myself as a teenager in Nigeria watching the funeral Mass of Pope St. John Paul II and the post-conclave announcement of Pope Benedict XVI and dreaming of a time when I may visit the Basilica of St. Peter. In the summer, my prayer was answered double fold as not only did we visit St. Peter's and the other 3 major Basilicas in Rome, but we also had catechesis with Pope Leo XIV just for seminarians. It has been a huge source of blessing for me and to have been able to share those moments with my fellow seminarians was remarkable.



Francis is in his fifth year of seminary

For more information on vocations, please visit:

<https://www.portsmouthvocations.org>



To continue supporting our seminarians, please visit:

<https://portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/clergy-training-fund/>



## Prayer for our seminarians



St Charles Borromeo and the Virgin Mary - Carlo Maratta; CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, unaltered.

God our Father, You have created for us some definite purpose. Grant us the grace to know the path You have planned for us in this life and to hear you call. May we respond with a generous "Yes." Bless our Diocese, our parishes, and our families and mould hearts to be fruitful and receptive ground for Your gift of vocations.

May our young people respond to Your call with courage and zeal. Stir among our men a desire and the courage and strength to be good and holy priests. Bless us with consecrated religious, permanent deacons and those called to a chaste single life. Gift us with faithful husbands and wives, who are a sign of Christ's love for His Church. We commend our prayer for vocations to You, Father, through the intercession of Mary our Mother, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

# Supporting Our Clergy

The Clergy Support Team provides pastoral, practical, and professional support to priests at all stages of ministry. Its work focuses on supporting clergy wellbeing, pastoral responsibilities, and ongoing formation, as well as offering specialist assistance during times of transition, illness, and retirement.

The team offers guidance to clergy in parish appointments, including support with pastoral challenges, work-life balance, and access to diocesan resources, counselling, or spiritual direction. It also supports priests in the early years of ministry and those arriving from other dioceses or countries, providing one-to-one guidance, orientation to diocesan policies, and support during the transition from seminary to parish life.

The Clergy Support Team arranges and manages the diocesan programme of continuing formation for all clergy, organising workshops, retreats, study days, and professional development sessions.

The annual ongoing formation programme offers 8 days of formation to all clergy, covering scripture, spiritual direction and diocesan policies. Further to these days the diocesan biannual retreat was held at Douai Abbey in September and there are days of reflection in Advent and Lent. In addition to the main programme, separate meetings for the coordinating pastors and for priests in the early years of ministry have offered each group the opportunity for personal development appropriate to the demands of their ministry.



# Supporting our retired priests

The Clergy Retirement Fund ensures that all priests who have faithfully served Christ and His Church are cared for in retirement.

Currently, 38 priests are retired, and 24 more are expected to retire over the next decade. The Diocese is practicing good stewardship by maintaining and refurbishing a portfolio of suitable properties for our retired priests. It is crucial that they receive the support they need—whether that's suitable accommodation, adequate healthcare and overall wellbeing, residential care when required, humble living expenses or pastoral support. Here, two of our retired priests share their experiences.

## Interview with Fr Patrick Tansey

**How long have you been a priest? When you look back over your years of priestly ministry, which moments stand out most to you, and what are you most grateful for?**

I was ordained in December 1982 so that means I have been a priest for 43 years. There is quite a lot to be grateful for over the years. I would say that I am most grateful for the Presence of the Lord in the good times as well as the bad. The prayers and support of the laity, especially when things weren't easy, in the parishes I have been in has helped me immensely.

**What do you enjoy about being retired compared to active ministry?**

I am still adapting, it is a big change. I am glad to be retired, I felt that it was time; I have been told by many parishioners that it was well deserved.

I enjoy not having the responsibilities of an active ministry priest. I am concerned about pressure on our priests due to a lack of vocations in the coming years.

I am enjoying having more time which I can spend in prayer and reflections without rushing, this has been a great grace. I am also beginning to develop an attitude to do those things which I had not had a chance to do before.



**What were your expectations of retirement?**

I felt that I had left it a bit too late to consider due to pressure of work. Priests should really start thinking of retirement five years before the diocese's requirements! Two years before retirement, I began to consider where to retire. Having been parish priest in Tadley for 17 years, I felt that I was well connected to the local community. I am very grateful to Bishop Philip that he agreed I could retire here. My expectations have been realised to a great extent.

**What advice would you give to priests who are approaching retirement?**

Start thinking about retirement five years before the diocesan rule for retirement! Form a plan about what you expect. I am very grateful for the help and support I've received from the diocesan retirement group, both before and after my retirement, and recommend serving priests to make contact as early as possible with its members.

## Interview with Fr Vincent Harvey

**How long have you been a priest? When you look back over your years of priestly ministry, which moments stand out most to you, and what are you most grateful for?**

I was ordained in 1979, and I'm coming up to my 47th year of ordination!

It is difficult to highlight specific high points in my exercise of priesthood! I have always enjoyed living and working with fellow priests, and working with deacons and laity! All of them have deepened my understanding of the church, ministry and priesthood, and enriched the exercise of Priestly ministry. Some of the friendships created have lasted into retirement.

For some years I was a Vicar General which was a challenging but 'eye-opening' time. To work closely with the Bishop (+Crispian Hollis and then briefly with +Philip) was a privilege: to see and share the issues they had to deal with made me appreciate the pressures a bishop is under.

One of the high points in the last 47 years would be the building of St Bede Church in Basingstoke. In particular the work of consultation with all parishioners in the area, in order to know that the direction we were moving in was correct! Not only was the consultation about the possibility of closing Mass centres, and building one church, it also included consultation about its design! From day one, right up to the opening of the church, everyone in the parish was involved (in the sense of ongoing consultation).

I would say that the high point in my ministry was working with others, learning with and through them, and experiencing the fruits of priesthood!



**What were your expectations of retirement?**

I approached retirement with hesitation, as I am a bit of a workaholic! Nevertheless, as I had seen too many priests continue beyond retirement age and begin to allow development and forward movement to slow down, I was determined not to allow that to happen! I was blessed in that my retirement was not delayed, in fact was about a month early!

As I come from Guernsey, I wanted to be near the sea. Some of my colleagues and friends were surprised I did not wish to return to Guernsey, where three of my brothers were still living (one has since died) and some of their children and grandchildren. I decided to stay on the mainland, because of the many friends I have made since beginning my training in 1972. I was 'dreaming' of being near the open sea, until the small bungalow that I'm in became available! The road I am on is off a dead end road and I can walk to the small woods near me in two minutes, and within seven minutes walking be at the waterside, which is part of the huge expanse of Portsmouth Harbour!

## What do you enjoy about being retired compared to active ministry?

I enjoy my own space. Throughout my priestly ministry I have mainly been in large parishes, so always with other priests. I enjoyed being with other priests, as I feel it is more human and healthy to be able to share ideas and concerns with others! Nevertheless that does mean not having, completely, one's own space!

Also living without the pressure of work! I am supplying in various parishes, about three weekends a month: I am meeting a number of people to give them spiritual direction; and I have given the odd talk here or there!

Being retired means that all of this takes longer to do or prepare, certainly in my case! Nevertheless there is not the pressure one has when one is in a parish! I enjoy reading, walking (when my back allows me to do so) and catching up, as already implied, with family and friends!

## What advice would you give to priests who are approaching retirement?

I would say "grasp it". The Diocese, in particular the Priest Retirement Team, are excellent at helping with that transition. In fact, they continue to keep an eye on one's welfare. I am aware that the reduction in active priests creates many issues. Nevertheless, I do not think the answer is for priests, or deacons, to stay on beyond retirement. There will always be, of course, the exception, for various reasons! There are other solutions to the ongoing development of parish life, in terms of various ministries that can be undertaken by lay people! I think this has not been fully explored, for various reasons! It works in the mission fields (Africa, South America and other places), so should work here also. It means, of course, breaking the mould and having courage!

### To continue supporting our retired priests, please visit:

<https://portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/clergy-retirement-fund/>

Or scan the  
QR code



### To learn more about leaving a gift in your will, please visit

<https://portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/legacy>

Or scan the  
QR code



## Thank you for your support to the Closer to Christ Campaign

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