

ROOTED IN PLACE, GROWING IN FAITH

THE DIOCESE OF TRURO'S STRATEGY FOR CHURCH BUILDINGS



“Churches are often the oldest surviving local landmarks, they provide a sense of continuity and place, playing a role in integrating diverse populations and welcoming new communities”

2026

OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS

There are currently 305 church buildings in our diocese, each cared for by dedicated clergy and volunteers.

Church buildings are deeply loved, but they frequently consume a disproportionate share of the time and funding that might otherwise support mission and ministry. Most churches in Cornwall are very old, often requiring major and unaffordable repairs simply to remain open, let alone to adapt for the needs of their communities. In many places, the church is the only remaining public building, yet access can be difficult, heating inefficient, facilities limited, and furniture dedicated to one particular posture - all of which can unintentionally discourage wider use.

At the same time, these buildings hold the stories and identity of their places in a unique way. Many are of significant architectural merit and are powerful physical signs of the enduring presence of the Church. Church buildings are often an icon of faith.

OUR VISION

We envision Cornwall's churches as well stewarded places of God's presence - rooted in their communities, sustaining worship and mission supported by frameworks that enable confident local decision making and free people to focus on ministry and mission.

This strategy sets out how we intend to achieve that: focusing on what is needed, learning from what is working - both locally and in other dioceses - and acting in ways that strengthen mission while stewarding our buildings with care, realism, and hope.

“Our prayer is that this strategy will help us steward these sacred places with courage and kindness, so that we remain rooted in place; growing in faith - and so that these buildings continue to be signs of God's life among us for generations to come.”

OUR PRIORITIES


1. We will prioritise investing in those places that might become 'at risk' without it.
2. We will prioritise those places that need support with their building to support their plans for fruitfulness and sustainability.
3. Churches are the focus not church halls and churchyards.
4. Conservation matters but this strategy will focus on actions that support usage, sustainability, ministry and mission.
5. We will explore alternative models for managing church buildings.
6. TDBF funds will be used to leverage further investment, resources and support.

Note about closing churches

Over the last ten years five churches have closed in our diocese. It is a decision that is typically very difficult, and is always led locally by the PCC. “The diocese” simply has not got the legal power to close a church.

A closed church is usually a sad and lasting liability for the TDBF to manage.

It should be noted that in not actively seeking to close churches we are deviating in our strategic to approach to a number of dioceses. We have assessed that this is the right way for our context.



“Every £1 invested in a church building, the benefit to communities is over £16.”

“The choices we make today are about what we want to carry forward into a tomorrow we want to see”

HELP PROTECT THE FUTURE OF OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS

Preserve and invest in Cornwall's historic churches so that as many as possible remain open and sustainable

WHAT WE ARE AIMING FOR	Increase in number of church buildings assessed as sustainable (or improving in sustainability) across condition, financial, and missional criteria.	Increase in the number of buildings moving from 'poor/at risk' to 'fair or good'.	Churches have greater access to predictable, suitable, timely funding that reflects the needs of their buildings.
	Churches able to remain open for worship and community use due to repair and sustainability interventions.	Increase in the number of parishes with funded, active maintenance plans for their historic buildings.	
HOW WE'LL MEASURE SUCCESS	QI reports and strategic review data. Parish income vs expenditure. % parish expenditure on repairs & maintenance. Engagement figures. PCC member capacity.	QI reports. Maintenance plans.	Total value of investment secured annually for repair, conservation, and improvement of historic church buildings
WHAT WE'LL DO	Give grants for up to £10k for repairs, maintenance & improvements intended to make safe, usable and prevent deterioration.	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to give tailored support focussed on fabric, including advice, training and project management. (0.8 FTE)	Give match funding grants of up to £20k for larger repairs and improvements works.
	Give grants for up to £10k for repairs, maintenance & improvements that will cut carbon emissions.	Subsidise the cost of quinquennial surveys for churches unable to pay for them.	Improve our use of data, particularly from QI inspections, to know more about the condition of church buildings to inform decision making, proactive work and prioritisation.
	Develop policy and practice to support churches with water management, for places that don't have any and those that have too much. Inclusive of adapting to respond to climate change.	Development partnerships with relevant training providers & heritage organisations to grow the pool of tradespeople with the necessary skills.	Resource Generosity through teaching, practical tools and guidance in order to grow financial sustainability.

DEVELOP SAFE, WELCOMING & MISSION FOCUSSED SPACES

Ensure buildings support worship, ministry, & vibrant community life

WHAT WE ARE AIMING FOR	More parishes have buildings that meet the needs of the existing congregations and potential users = 'fit for purpose'.	Parishes and their buildings are more sustainable through increased usage and available funds.	More parishes are able to deliver new or expanded ministry and mission activities due to improvements in their buildings.
HOW WE'LL MEASURE SUCCESS	Church condition records.	Parish funds and engagement levels.	Ministry and mission activities.
WHAT WE'LL DO	<p>Give grants for up to £10k for improvements that enable more usage of buildings for a diversity of purposes e.g. children's work, social action or community events.</p> <p>Actively work with partners such as local authorities, charities, businesses and faith organisations to re-grow the role of churches in their communities.</p>	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to help plan, resource and manage additional uses of church buildings to generate income and engage communities (0.5 FTE).	Work with the team delivering Growing Younger to prioritise investment where it is needed for children's and youth work.

REDUCE THE OPERATIONAL BURDEN ON CLERGY AND VOLUNTEERS

Streamline building responsibilities so people are freed for ministry and mission.

WHAT WE ARE AIMING FOR	Reduction in clergy and volunteer time spent on building related care and maintenance.	Parishes are more able to access funding and resources to support the care and maintenance of church buildings.	Alternative models for church maintenance are tested and learned from.
HOW WE'LL MEASURE SUCCESS	Self-reported data from clergy and volunteers about their experience (clergy wellbeing surveys and Articles of Inquiry).	Funding sourced. Resources accessed.	Cost savings from shared resources and services. Parish expenditure on repairs and maintenance.
WHAT WE'LL DO	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to help identify, apply for and manage funding (0.5 FTE).	Pilot a centrally managed provision for key annual maintenance tasks in 2 deaneries over 2 years. Paid for by the Diocese of Truro.	Pending the outcome of the maintenance pilot, roll out provision to all deaneries.
	Provide small grants for resources that will open up churches for use and reduce workload, e.g. heaters, automated locking, giving machines.	Explore possible ways of providing low-cost access to shared resources such as drone surveys, scaffolding towers and temporary heating.	Review the provision of resources for churches including those on the diocesan website and the QI format, considering models from other organisations.

EQUIP PARISHES TO MAKE CONFIDENT, INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR BUILDINGS

Provide a clear framework and support that guides local choices about the use, care, and future of their buildings

WHAT WE ARE AIMING FOR	Decisions about the future of church buildings are made more strategically, in line with local and diocesan plans.	Parishes are more supported when making decisions about the future of their church buildings.	Alternative options for long-term management of at risk churches are piloted, enabling different thinking tailored to context.
HOW WE'LL MEASURE SUCCESS	Strategic review data tracking church buildings at risk. Deanery planning reflecting plans for church buildings.	'Church at risk' plans in place. Strategic review data tracking church buildings at risk.	Proposals for long-term management of churches that parishes cannot sustain.
WHAT WE'LL DO	Provide a Church Buildings Support Officer to support churches with decision making about the future of their buildings. (0.2 FTE)	Develop a toolkit for decision making to guide churches that are at risk through the condition of the building, the capacity of the PCC or the finances.	Work with partners (other dioceses, the national church, heritage organisations) to explore alternative models of management of church buildings.
	Embed this strategy in the work of deaneries, the Diocesan Plan for Change & Renewal and Growing Younger to ensure buildings can support wider strategy and investments are co-ordinated.	Carry out a strategy review of church buildings using the Church Buildings Council approach – to enable more strategic decision making about buildings and to inform wider strategy.	

FUNDING IT

Funding for this work will come from the Asset Strategy (£2 million allocated over 8 year), funding bids, and grants for the Church Building Support Officers.

HOW WE GOT HERE

This strategy is the product of months of research and consultation. The author set up an advisory group with representatives from across diocesan life including churchwardens and clergy. This group helped review the 121 responses from PCCs, clergy, parish officers and lay ministers to a consultation survey. Reports and research into church buildings was carried out and data already held by the diocese on finances, attendance and building conditions was reviewed. There were also discussions with other dioceses and heritage organisations to learn what worked and what didn't. The results of all this work, is the strategy which has been approved.

FIND OUT MORE

The full strategy is available to read on the diocesan website here:



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