



## Project team members

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**Laity:** Lucy Sayer (lead), Sadie Blyth, Catherine Hobbs, Brian McCreesh, Sue McCrohon, Janette Nevett, Paul Pillai, Tony Seejo, Ryan Taylor, Jerrin Varghese

**Clergy:** Canon James McAuley, Fr Anthony Fyk, Fr Thomas Hiney, Fr Emmanuel Rinda, Deacon Ryan Browne, Deacon Zacharias Parambi

**Church communities:** Cathedral of St John the Evangelist (autumn 2024 Mass attendance of 944), Corpus Christi (attendance of 283), St Joseph (attendance of 78), Our Lady and St Swithun (attendance of 228). Total Mass attendance in autumn 2024 in the Pastoral Area (PA) was 1,533.

**Schools:** St Edmund's Secondary, Corpus Christi PS, St John's PS, St Swithun's PS.

**Halls:** Cathedral Discovery Centre, St Joseph, St Swithun.

## Background and Progress on Mission Plan

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The Project Team oversees the implementation of the Diocesan Mission Plan *You Will Be My Witnesses* (YWBMMW) in the Portsmouth PA. The team includes clergy and laity from each parish or church community in the PA and has met since early 2024. It is supported daily through a PA Living Rosary.

In summer 2024, the team decided to have two areas of focus: **Formation for Service** and **Stewardship of Resources** to consider how to build our communities now and into the future. Key milestones to date include:

1. November 2023: YWBMMW open consultation meeting on the draft diocesan plan, attended by about 80 people from across the PA (most participants were from the two smallest church communities).
2. February 2024: Formation of the Project Team and initiation of monthly meetings.
3. May 2024: Draft Mission Plan forwarded to the Diocese and published on the cathedral website. Very few responses were received to an invitation for comments from parishioners.
4. September 2024: Survey and feedback from all our church communities. Despite vigorous promotion of the survey and the opportunity to respond in hard copy or via Microsoft Forms, a total of 15 responses were received (about 1% of the average Mass attendance in the PA). 8 responses were from the cathedral parish, 12 from the 60+ age groups, and 13 had a White British/Irish ethnic profile.
5. October 2024: Formation of two subgroups, **Formation for Service** (focusing on the first two areas of the diocesan plan) and **Stewardship of Resources** (focusing on the third area).

## Issues for Further Consideration

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1. The Organogram (Appendix 1) broadly illustrates the spread of ministries that can be expected in a vibrant faith-filled parish community. For the PA, it helps us organise our efforts and illustrates how our two subgroups relate to each other. Some ministries occur in every current parish and some not at all. The structure remains to a large degree aspirational, and it highlights areas or gaps where we might work together. Schools, Youth Groups and Families could also be placed in headings other than Formation (e.g., Evangelisation and Sacramental Life and Worship).
2. YWBMMW assumes that its implementation in each PA will be best achieved by the PA becoming one canonical parish. The canonical requirement of "just cause" for this to happen will require us to demonstrate the benefits or circumstances that might justify such a simplification of the current canonical structure, and the timing thereof. Indicators might include the number of priests, financial



resources and commitments, better decision making around estates, better communications, and coordinated ministries.

3. The lack of engagement by the laity in the mission plan, evidenced by the poor response to the open survey and to the publication of the draft PA mission plan, is symptomatic of a deeper disengagement. Giving per Mass attendee in the PA is less than the diocesan average and each parish has trouble in engaging and retaining volunteers. Factors which may contribute to the disengagement include (i) the transient nature of some communities, especially the cathedral with its large student and immigrant population; (ii) the large number of ethnic groups in many of our communities with little integration; (iii) parking in many streets of the city is difficult in the evenings and this acts as a disincentive to attending evening activities.
4. The PA is unique in that it contains the diocesan cathedral, which is both a parish and a diocesan asset. The financial resources required to provide for the needs of the cathedral are considerably more than those available to the PA.

Initiatives under consideration are as follows:

### Formation for Service

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- A) **Communications:** connectivity could be improved in view of the proximity of our churches within the city. The following ideas under consideration:
- A joint newsletter offers the benefit of simplified information sharing, enabling easier access to all types of services and activity.
  - A PA website is under consideration to provide a doorway into Catholic Portsmouth (the defunct domain name [www.catholicportsmouth.org.uk](http://www.catholicportsmouth.org.uk) has been re-acquired).
  - A PA app could be an easily accessible mobile tool, and its cost is being researched.

These initiatives would not only help information sharing but also have the potential to provide a repository to support both personal and community development.

- B) **Catechesis:** the provision of centralised support and training for all those involved with catechesis at local church level (children's and adults' groups) could be effective.

Working as a PA provides an opportunity to energise the teaching happening across the parishes, from RCIA to children's liturgy: to see all teaching as mission, and to attempt to remove the barriers to volunteering. The presence of the University and local Catholic schools means that student and teacher voices should be distinctly heard within this initiative.

Our aspiration is a ready, equipped volunteer culture that is more satisfying for parishioners.

- C) **Needs within our city:** there are social outreach initiatives in place in most of our churches. The mapping of the PA recently undertaken by Caritas will help to identify further opportunities, development of which is of course dependent on the engagement of volunteers.

### Stewardship of Resources

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- A) Finance

- The introduction of Xero has provided an opportunity to enhance both decisions and financial transparency. Better and more timely communication of the financial position will hopefully increase trust, and therefore giving, by parishioners.
- Rationalisation of the number of bank accounts – but not to one for the whole PA.



- Consideration will be given to having each church as a cost centre, which would provide more visibility on the net financial contribution of each to the mission of the whole.
- Identification of opportunities to reduce costs (removal of duplication) and to increase revenue (giving by parishioners, better marketing of the cathedral hall, etc.). There are now DONA machines in all four churches in the PA.

#### B) Administration

- A better model for the PA might be to have an individual responsible for defined activities (finance, admin, H&S) across the PA rather than an administrator in each current parish responsible for all tasks in that parish.

#### C) Estates

- OLOL, Eastney – Mass has not been celebrated in this church since November 2024. A canonical process permanently to alienate the property will begin in due course, with any net disposal proceeds accruing to Our Lady & St Swithun parish.
- Hall rental – the cathedral hall is an underutilised asset compared to the rental income achieved by the halls at St Swithun and St Joseph. The PA's one investment property (the former presbytery in Eastney) needs investment to yield a better rental income.
- Medium- and long-term plans for renovation of the churches and other buildings are required. The cathedral site will require significant funding external to the PA.

#### Visible impact?

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Indications of change have yet to be developed, but may include:

- Trends in Mass attendance and cross-parish participation.
- Greater links between parish(es) and schools, including more families from the schools attending Mass and engaged in the life of the parish.
- Trends in participation in the sacraments of initiation and reconciliation.
- Volunteer numbers and hours donated.
- *Per capita* financial giving to the parish, greater realisation of the rental potential of the halls and of our one investment property.

#### An indicative timeline

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1. Staff and/or volunteer leads to research the above initiatives to be agreed and identified – summer 2025.
2. Any *Formation for Service* projects costed and agreed across parishes – winter 2025.
3. Canonical consultation on the amalgamation of the current parishes – perhaps spring 2026.
4. Organisational changes – admin, comms, finance – in place perhaps summer 2026.
5. New canonical parish – perhaps from 1st September 2026.



# Portsmouth Pastoral Area (PA)

Formation and Mission

Resources

PA Clergy & PA Council

\* Person sits on the PA council

