

# CHURCH TIMES

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## Leader comment: Money to turn the C of E more outward-looking

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[ANNOUNCEMENTS](#) of new funding under the umbrella of the new Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) suggest that the wind has changed direction in the corridors of Church House, Westminster. The word “parish” has crept back into the text as something worth supporting, if not exactly in need of saving. Whether this heralds the departure of the Mary Poppins of mega-churches remains to be seen. Certainly, the first tranche of grants indicates that dioceses are being given greater freedom to spread [money](#) more widely. The eschewing of “discrete projects” is to be welcomed. While the creation of new, large town-centre churches remains in vogue, it is interesting to see a more nuanced language emerging. The [diocese of Worcester](#) has concluded that “renewals” in parish churches are less risky than new plants.

This suggests that learning from previous projects is being shared internally, at least. Church House has certainly been keen to move “from anecdote to evidence”; yet, despite evidence linking [growth](#) to higher numbers of clergy ([News, 5 August 2016](#)), it is unclear whether a bid simply requesting funding for this would be successful. The narrative opposing “subsidising decline” remains in force. It remains open, however, for poorer dioceses to use Lowest Income Communities Funding to help meet the wage bill.

It should be recalled that the Commissioners’ coffers were raided specifically for projects that would grow the Church numerically. It was a financial calculation as much as a missional one, made in the light of forward projections that saw [attendance](#) diminishing steadily in future

years. It was not principally that the Church of England needed new donors, though it did; but that its [mission](#) to serve the whole nation was under threat — for how could a small sect of inward-looking believers hope to demonstrate God’s love to the wider society, or hope to influence others to behave Christianly?

“Mission” is thus the watchword, the key to unlock tranches of new money, and all can share the desire to make the love of God more widely known. In some ways, however, we prefer a neglected Evangelical term, “outreach”. More limited than “mission”, it none the less serves as a reminder that Anglicanism has never behaved as if virtue were the preserve of the worshipping community. [Buildings](#) are important. Everyone wishes their church to be beautiful, inspiring, warm, and well-equipped; but attracting people into a building is only one model of mission, and the numbers attending worship only one measure of the effectiveness of the Church’s ministry.

All who apply for SMMI grants must be aware that this is not free money. There must always be an element of risk in new ventures, but money spent on a new venture that fails to attract the projected number of new worshippers — and between 2014 and 2021 most of them did — is money that could have been used many times over to support the ministry of debt relief, school and youth work, improved housing, the care of migrants, and so on. SMMI guidance expects diocesan applicants to include “front-line ministries” in their plans. We hope that this vision is championed.