

To all Licensed Clergy, Clergy with PTO, Licensed Lay Ministers, PCC Secretaries and PCC Treasurers

Date: Wednesday 25th September 2024
Our ref: MJS/ec-bp4393

Season of Creation

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Many of you will be celebrating harvest festivals at the moment and we pray that these are joyful occasions as you give thanks to God for the goodness and beauty of creation. For those who live and minister in our rural communities, you will be particularly mindful of the challenges being faced by farmers – not just the vagaries of the weather but also government policy and market forces which make it very hard for smaller or tenant farmers to make a living. In our urban areas, life can feel far removed from the production of food, but we have been pleased to see a growing movement of ‘outdoor churches’ which help people to connect with creation. Similarly, initiatives such as ‘Ride and Stride’ help connect the urban and the rural and remind us that, whatever our context, God is interested in every part of our lives.

Diocesan Strategy

Attached to this letter you will find a simple ‘strategy on a page’ document, together with a summary of the 3 Key Questions for churches and ministers, and 5 Priorities for Bishops and Diocesan Synod. These are a summary of a much longer document which went to Diocesan Synod earlier this month and was agreed by a large majority. Much of this is unchanged from previous strategy documents – the three key questions on discipleship remain central and we hope that churches will continue to use these to shape your own mission and ministry (remembering that they are questions – it is for you to discern locally the answers to these questions).

Underneath the three key questions sit 5 strategic priorities – these are primarily for diocesan leaders as we make decisions about resource allocation, and underneath these are specific aims for 2030. If you have questions about any of this, please speak to your archdeacon or other members of the Bishop’s Leadership Team.

Bishops’ Study Day – Thursday 28th November – St Martins House, 9.30am to 3pm

A reminder that the next Bishops’ Study Day will include school leaders and will look creatively and critically through the Growing Faith lens, focusing on the question, *how are we Growing Faith at the intersection of school and church?* We’ve invited seven creative and innovative leaders to answer this question from their unique context and perspective. We’re giving each of them 15 minutes to share their story, ideas, and reflections.

The Study Day is for all clergy and licensed lay ministers. Due to potential large numbers, on this occasion, priority will be given to clergy (stipendiary clergy are expected to attend in

person) and school leaders (who we hope you will encourage to attend!) We hope to provide a zoom link so those who cannot attend in person can still join online. [Please book HERE.](#)

The day will consist of a series of short presentations looking at theology as well as practice and will provide time for everyone to share something of what you are already doing, as well as your hopes for the future. Clearly this will link to our hope to have many more 'Growing Faith Ministers' in the diocese in the years to come. We see these as senior leaders who will shape the future of the church alongside Oversight Ministers, and we hope and pray that many clergy will sense a vocation to this vital ministry in the future.

Minster Communities

Many churches around the diocese are now involved in the Minster Community process, and the remaining parishes will be invited to start the process in the next six months. We want to express our sincere gratitude to all those who have engaged and given time to this process. We understand that this process is causing anxiety in some quarters – it is a big change, and we are having to face some uncomfortable truths (not least about finance). Yet there is also considerable enthusiasm in many parts of the diocese. As a reminder of why we are adopting this approach, it is worth mentioning:

1. **Greater support for isolated clergy and church officers.** The Church of England has experimented with various forms of team working in the past, and we recognise that this is not something that comes naturally to churches that are used to being quite independent. But when (for instance) treasurers from a group of churches meet, they find that they have all been facing the same challenges and there is much to be gained through mutual support and joint working.
2. **Realism about finances.** As detailed below, there will be a much closer link between Parish Contributions and the cost of stipendiary ministry. Churches which contribute small amounts in Parish Contributions, will not only have to share a stipendiary vicar, but will also be encouraged to find their own non-stipendiary clergy or lay ministers. Diocesan staff will support this process, but we want to ask every person in our churches: "is God calling you to exercise ministry in God's church?"
3. **A greater focus on mission and serving our communities.** The process of forming Minster Communities encourages every church to consider its distinct calling and mission. We can no longer work on a model of waiting for people to come to us. So we are encouraging churches to be imaginative about engaging with people who do not come to church and find new ways of connecting with people.
4. **Closer working with our schools.** A total of 23,000 children and young people attend one of our 97 church schools. Very few of them attend church but they do learn about the Christian faith in school and are often open to invitations to attend lunchtime or after-school Christian groups. It is essential that we do more to engage with them.
5. Finally, all of this stems from **changes taking place in wider society** – fewer than 50% of the population ticked the box "Christian" in the 2021 census, down from 72% in 2001. We should not be anxious about this – God is still at work among us – but we have to accept the reality of change.

Finances

Once again, we want to express our sincere thanks for the generous giving from so many people in the diocese. Even as we face significant financial challenges in the diocese, we are mindful that every pound given represents an individual or family expressing their love for God and their support for God's church. We are very grateful.

We are also aware of various rumours circulating in the diocese about our finances. Some of these represent genuine misunderstandings, but sadly some are based on hearsay and not fact. Here are just some of which we have become aware:

1. **Why is the diocese spending so much money on staff based in St Martins House – surely this money could be spent on parish priests?** In response to this, we want to say that it is true that we employ a lot more staff than was the case 50 years ago, but when you look at the detail, it is quite clear the money could not simply be transferred to pay for parish priests. So, we have various categories of staff:
 - a. Those we have a legal duty to employ e.g. Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, Director of Education.
 - b. Those who are employed for 'commercial activities' i.e. St Martins House conference centre and St Martins Lodge – overall these staff help to generate income rather than being a pure cost.
 - c. Those who directly support parish ministry e.g. DAC Secretary (dealing with applications for faculties); Finance Officer (ensuring that clergy receive their stipends).
 - d. Those paid for by the national church to support the diocese during this time of change (see below on national church funding).

We have made significant reductions to category (c) and we are in the process of making further reductions in spending, but we are doing this to address our large deficit – the money cannot therefore be transferred to pay stipends for priests. In addition, the overall number of staff (when those involved in commercial activities are discounted) is very much in line with other similar sized dioceses. In short, we are not being profligate, but rather seeking to ensure that parishes are well supported – even though it may not always feel like it simply because of the level of change going on in society and in the church.

2. **Why isn't the diocese applying for national church funding so that we can have more parish priests?** This is a fair question given that the Church Commissioners have a lot of money. However, whether we agree with it or not, they have determined that they will only make grants for two things:
 - a. Lowest Income Communities – we receive about £1million per year to support parishes in economically poorer areas. This helps to pay for parish priests in communities which could never afford to pay the full costs themselves. We are in the process of reviewing the precise allocation of this money and hope to be in touch with churches soon on this.
 - b. Strategic Mission and Ministry – this is to help dioceses fulfil the national church vision and strategy for 'missionary disciples', 'mixed ecology' church, 'younger and more diverse' church as well as environmental work and racial

justice. We have already received some money from this fund, and we are applying for more. However, to put it bluntly, this money has to go to new work rather than maintaining existing work. So, we cannot simply apply for more parish priests – we have been told very clearly that such an application would not be considered.

3. **Why is the diocese putting lots of money into a few ‘resourcing churches’ and ‘intercultural worshipping communities’ rather than spreading this money around?** It is true that some of the national church funding that we have received has been focused on a few churches. This was a deliberate and strategic decision, and we have clear evidence that it is bearing fruit e.g. our six resourcing churches have seen a combined increase in attendance of 800 people since the project started, as well as starting 26 new worshipping communities (some of these are new churches on new housing estates, some are new congregations meeting in the parish church). In addition, there has been a very significant increase in parish contribution from each of these churches. So, while it will always be debatable as to whether this is the best use of grant money, and while it is true that our own resourcing churches are doing better than those in some other dioceses, the facts show very clearly that parish churches (all our resourcing churches and IWCs are parish churches) are seeing considerable benefit from this investment.
4. **Does the diocese have a plan to balance the budget?** The answer is yes, even though we may have struggled to communicate this well, and implementing it is also a challenge. The main strand of this strategy is to ensure that parish contributions match expenditure on stipends, pensions and housing for parish priests. So later this year we will be publishing what each parish gives in parish contribution – this list will make it very clear which benefices contribute the £64,000 per year which is the cost of a full-time stipendiary priest (for 2025). However, we can tell you now that the vast majority of benefices do not contribute anything like £64,000 per year, which is one of the reasons why we are encouraging parishes to work together in Minster Communities i.e. to share a priest and develop their own non-stipendiary ministry team.

We hope that this addresses some of the rumours circulating in the diocese. We are always keen to dialogue with people who have concerns or alternative suggestions. But it is important that this dialogue is based on facts rather than hearsay.

Prayers of Love and Faith

You will know that the House of Bishops and General Synod have agreed that clergy and lay ministers may pray with same-sex couples in existing services using the resources known as ‘prayers of love and faith’. Work is also underway to allow this to happen in stand-alone services – although it is likely that parishes will have to register for this. In addition, for those clergy and parishes who are opposed to this development, there will be a mechanism for them to request ‘extended episcopal ministry’ i.e. from a bishop who shares their understanding of marriage and human sexuality. Details of this scheme have not yet been finalised – General Synod will probably be considering it again in February.

All of this has proved very controversial and painful for those most affected. We are very keen, as your bishops, to make ourselves available to anyone who would like to discuss this further. In addition, the archdeacons are keen to support PCCs as you consider these matters. Diocesan Synod will also have its own discussions in 2025 although we don't yet have a definite date.

In all of this, we continue to ask for grace and kindness as the church continues to learn about living with difference.

Bishop of Leicester's Chaplaincy Lectures 2024

As part of the new 'Chaplaincy Lectures', a joint initiative between us and the universities in Leicester and Loughborough, we are delighted to announce the next lecture will take place at Loughborough University on Thursday 7th November. The lecture will be given by the Rt Hon The Lord Paul Boateng CVO entitled "The Challenge of the Margins - The Role of Church and State in Addressing the Needs of the Overlooked at Home and Abroad." Lord Boateng is a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury and High Commissioner to South Africa, currently the Chairman of The Archbishops Commission on Racial Justice, and Co-Chair of the Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission. Further details will be advertised soon.

Bishops' Retreat Days

Finally, a reminder of the retreat days at Launde which are open to all clergy and lay ministers - and are intended simply as a gift of time and space.

Dates for the next few months are:

Wednesday 9th October

Wednesday 6th November

Saturday 9th November

Thursday 12th December

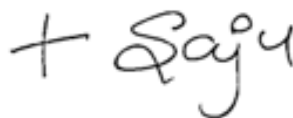
For more information and to book your place, please contact our office on Bishops.office@leicestercofe.org or 0116 2708985.

As always, we continue to pray and give thanks for you and your ministry.

Yours in Christ,



The Rt Revd Martyn Snow
Bishop of Leicester



The Rt Revd Saju Muthalaly
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