

## **To all Licensed Clergy, Clergy with PTO and Licensed Lay Ministers**

Date: Monday 24 June 2024

Our ref: MJS/jp-bp4295

Birth of John the Baptist

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We hope that this pastoral letter finds you well, and that you have a time of rest / holiday planned for the summer.

### **Good News**

We have recently received back from the national church our Statistics for Mission analysis (thank you to everyone involved in completing these forms). The good news is that overall our “worshipping community” figure (total numbers involved in church) rose by 5% in 2023. Even more encouragingly, the number of children and young people attending our churches rose by 15% in the same period. Of course, these figures come with all sorts of caveats – we are still in a post-Covid context – and it will not feel the same in all parts of the diocese. But when they are combined with the exciting news that 21 new worshipping communities were started in Leicester and Leicestershire last year, and that numbers of people exploring their vocation in the diocese remain high, I am sure you will agree that we should give thanks to God!

### **Pastoral Conversations**

At the same time, we have also become increasingly aware that the roll-out of Minister Communities has raised lots of vocational and pastoral questions for ministers in the diocese. In particular, we recognise that for stipendiary clergy, questions of housing, stipend, and pension are often combined with wider vocational questions. We are therefore looking to have pastoral conversations with all stipendiary clergy through the Autumn and the early part of 2025, and also to offer these, on an opt-in basis, to other ministers.

We want to stress that these will be purely pastoral conversations – an opportunity to speak of your hopes for the future and any concerns or questions you may have. The conversations are entirely separate from the Ministerial Development Review process, the Minister Community conversations that might be running in your area, and from any appointment processes which may be running during this timeframe. The meetings may happen at Bishop’s Lodge, or at your own home – or we may choose to go for a walk together. Our office will be in touch with stipendiary clergy about these meetings over the summer. If you are a non-stipendiary minister, please feel free to email [bishops.office@leicestercofe.org](mailto:bishops.office@leicestercofe.org) to request a meeting.

## Diocesan Strategy

As we hope many of you will be aware, we, as a diocese, are in the process of finalising our longer-term strategy. In January, all members of Diocesan Synod, Diocesan Trustees, Bishop's Children and Youth Council, Bishop's Council, Area Deans, Lay Chairs and the Bishop's Leadership Team were invited to a discernment morning and given a workbook seeking their input on important questions about how various aspects of diocesan life should look going forwards. The feedback from those workbooks together with the findings from the diocese-wide consultations of recent years have helped us discern a draft strategy. The same group of leaders from across the diocese met again on 19<sup>th</sup> June to discuss that draft strategy, before it comes to Diocesan Synod for a final decision in September.

Much about this draft strategy is unchanged – our vision remains the Kingdom of God (this will never change!); and our three key questions remain central: how are you growing and enabling others to grow in the depth of their discipleship? How are you growing numbers of disciples? And how are you growing and enabling others to grow in loving service of the world?

Other parts of our strategy have been emerging in recent years, in response to significant changes in our society and the Church. This includes our five strategic priorities:

- Intercultural Communities – where members have a deep understanding and respect for all cultures, everyone – whatever their background – learns from one another and grows together.
- Intergenerational Communities – where two or more generations are intentionally brought together to learn from, serve, and worship with one another.
- New Communities – ways of gathering as the people of God – whether revitalisations, fresh expressions, plants or grafts - that enable us to reach more of the 93% of Britons who don't go to church.
- Reconciling Communities – where people share the love of God across difference, and experience the restoration of relationships with others, with themselves, with creation, and with God.
- Eco Communities – taking seriously our calling to be good stewards of the natural world, especially in light of climate crisis.

It has also included the discernment and roll-out of Minster Communities – bringing together churches, schools and chaplaincies around a shared mission.

Defining our strategy is a significant part of achieving a balanced budget as a diocese. As we made clear in our recent letter, our financial situation remains very challenging. DBF trustees are currently exploring proposals for further changes to our central support services, and the strategy includes a series of principles to guide our work in reducing our deficit (but this still depends on Parish Contributions at least keeping pace with inflation).

Please do keep our strategy work in your prayers, that it might help us see the Kingdom of God grow in our villages, towns and city.

## **National Church Grants**

Alongside our strategy development work, we have also been working with the national church on grant applications. So, we are currently advertising for a Director of Racial Equity and for two roles connected to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. We understand that some will wonder why we are not using this money for parish appointments. Let us be clear: it does not mean that we prioritise these roles above parish ministry. Rather, the pots of funding which are enabling these appointments are tightly circumscribed for specific areas of work related to the priorities of the national church and endorsed by General Synod. As it stands, the Church Commissioners will not fund stipendiary parish ministry, and so we remain dependent on Parish Contributions to cover these costs. Accessing these resources from the national church helpfully allows us to see progress in realising our strategic priorities which otherwise, given our deficit, would not be possible.

It is our sincere hope that these time-limited roles (2-3 years) will bring real benefit to our parishes, and help resource your work as you seek to realise the aspects of the Kingdom of God which we have tried to articulate in our strategic priorities. As well as being a real issue of justice, our racial equity work is linked to increasing the numbers of Global Majority Heritage people belonging to and leading our churches – something which is already bearing real fruit in the diocese. And our call as Christians to respond to climate change has been a consistent theme in all our consultations with young people in the diocese – so this is about genuinely listening to the voices of a younger generation.

Related to this, we have also been preparing a very sizeable grant application to the national church related to the intergenerational strand of our strategy and the national church's "Growing Younger" priority. This will allow us to create a number of new Minister Community roles - "Growing Faith Ministers" – which will oversee work with schools, churches and households to enable children and young people to grow in faith, and to enable them to become leaders in our churches today and in the future.

The application process is moving much more slowly than we had originally thought (mainly due to the amount of money we are requesting). But we are still hopeful that we may be in a position to start recruiting to the first of these roles in 2025.

We are grateful to the Church Commissioners for releasing funds for these posts. But it is worth stating that, as with most 'external' funders, these resources can only be used for restricted purposes: we cannot ask the national church for money for parish-based stipendiary ministry, no matter how much we as Bishops and those communities value those roles. We are reliant on the generosity of our church-members, on our PCCs in deciding their Parish Contribution, and on our own efforts in balancing the diocesan budget to be able to allocate resources in a more unrestricted fashion.

## **Called Together, Ordinations and Upcoming Cathedral Services**

As already mentioned, we are hugely encouraged by the numbers and diversity of people exploring their vocation (as a diocese, we are bucking the national trend in this area). It was wonderful to have a full Cathedral for this year's Called Together service when eleven new Associate Ministers were commissioned and licensed, alongside many others renewing. We

have now fixed this service for Pentecost weekend each year. Please do encourage specific people in your churches (and schools!) to explore this ministry – we will need many more Associate Ministers in the future, and everyone who has taken part speaks highly of the training and support.

Our ordination services this year take place at the Cathedral on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June, 4pm (Priests) and Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June, 10.30am (Deacons). We have five people being ordained deacon and five people being ordained priest. We realise that it will not be possible for many clergy and lay ministers to attend the Sunday morning service, but we sincerely hope that all ministers would attend the Saturday ordination of priests. You are invited to robe and process – please email [Bev.Collett@LeicesterCofE.org](mailto:Bev.Collett@LeicesterCofE.org). Please do join us for these services if you can, and please be praying for the candidates.

During September 2024, there will be two significant services at the Cathedral, to which all are welcome. More information will be included in Diomail in due course but please do save the dates:

- Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September at 3.30pm – Eucharist to celebrate the **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Priests** in the Church of England.
- Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September at 3.30pm – Choral Evensong Service to celebrate the **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Cathedral Girls' Choir** – the first ever such choir in an English Cathedral.

### **Next Bishops' Study Day**

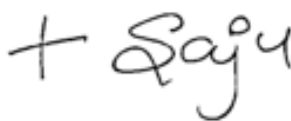
Our next Study Day takes place on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> November and is for clergy, lay ministers and **school leaders**. If you have not done so already, please do speak to the Headteachers of your local schools to make sure they have the date in their diary (we will write to them again in September). We hope that the day will be inspirational and will provide an opportunity for detailed conversations on Growing Faith and Minister Communities in particular. Although we are always hesitant to speak of the “three-line whip”, we do want to be clear that stipendiary clergy are expected to attend the Bishops' Study Days unless there is a very good reason – hence we are giving lots of notice!

With continued thanks for your ministry,

Yours in Christ,



The Rt Revd Martyn Snow  
Bishop of Leicester



The Rt Revd Saju Muthalaly  
Bishop of Loughborough

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