



A LETTER FROM THE BISHOPS, ARCHDEACONS, ELECTED CHAIRS AND DIOCESAN SECRETARY

20 July 2020

Dear Friends,

We are writing to you as members of the family of the church in the Diocese of Lincoln. The Diocesan Synod met on Saturday 18th July and received recommendations from the working groups that it set up in November 2019. Some of you may have been at the meeting so will have heard what was said in person, but we felt it important to write to everyone who is part of the diocesan family so that we could all begin the process of thinking and praying through the implications of the different recommendations together.

In his presentation to Synod, Bishop David set out what we sense many of us already know: that we cannot afford the pattern of ministry to which we have aspired and that the struggle to maintain buildings and worship services in their current pattern is taking an unsustainable toll on us all. Faithful church officers are tired. Faithful clergy and lay ministers are over-burdened.

In facing this reality, it is important, however, to note that the last years have seen some really positive things: levels of commitment to the Church in the diocese are high despite the challenges; the rate of decline in attendance at worship has slowed significantly; we are no longer at the bottom of the Church of England's table for giving; many of our congregations, of all types and across the different parts of the diocese, have grown in confidence and some in numbers.

So we are at a turning point: we need to recognise and build from places of strength and we need to rethink how we deploy our different resources in order to move on from the debilitating effects of trying to 'keep things going', only with fewer people, and with greater numbers of churches and parishes being asked to work together in ever larger isolated and independent units.

Here are some of the main themes of the recommendations from Bishop's Council to Synod and thus to us all:

- Distance and the effects of isolation are big issues for the people of Lincoln Diocese. Let's tackle these by building shared ministry teams of clergy and laity, working not over single parishes or benefices but across areas that match those of our Local Authorities: we need to support each other and bring different gifts to bear.
- Our parish share, which is the common fund that together with our income from historical assets pays for our stipendiary clergy and the diocesan staff that support our parishes, is continuing to decline. Let's think again about parish share and move towards an approach in which parishes are empowered to contribute towards the common fund as an act of covenant or promise: we need to know that our gift enables our life together, and that as we give, so we also receive.
- Our church buildings, so important to so many in our communities, are challenging to maintain and do not always have the facilities that are necessary for worship or hospitality today and into the future. Can we recognise that our Christian life, as every other aspect of life today, now has 'multiple layers of

belonging'? - That as we probably shop at a supermarket for some things but in our neighbourhood shop for others so we might worship on a Sunday in one well-provided for building but during the week choose to meet for prayer or study more locally: we need to revisit, update and build on the work that was done about 'church categorisation' and then move swiftly to implementation.

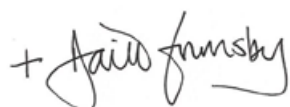
- Finally, and this theme relates to all of the above, we must cut our coat according to our cloth, which means that we must be responsible about costs, more transparent and mutually accountable in every respect, and, generally, more modest in our expectations: our diocese is very rich in many ways, but we must be humble as we deploy these riches and always mindful of the vulnerable, the poor and the marginalised.

In giving you these 'main themes' we want to emphasise that what was presented to Synod on Saturday is, we believe, hopeful, positive and honest. Over 60 people contributed to the different working groups, drawn from across the diocese, lay and ordained. In adopting their recommendations, we are committing to a programme that will be challenging to us all, but that we believe offers us the best chance to build on our strengths together, while tackling those areas of our life that have been persistently difficult to address.

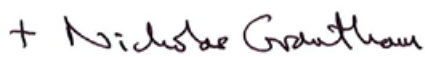
In the autumn, we will be holding a series of public meetings across the diocese (at which participation will also be possible by electronic means) during which we will share more, listen to suggestions and be able to discuss with you how this way forward will be implemented. On 21st November, Diocesan Synod will take decisions about implementation so that we can then begin to put plans into action during 2021.

This has been a difficult year for everyone. The bishops wrote in their 'Ad Clerum' last week particularly about the impact of Covid-19 and about Black Lives Matter, but set these issues within the context of other important things such as climate change and our own life together as a diocese. They commented that at this 'turning-point time' they profoundly believe that we have the resources to meet our different challenges by working together. We are all committed to this shared working and commend the recommendations presented at Synod to you for your prayers and consideration.

With profound thanks for your fellowship in the gospel,



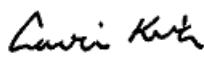
The Rt Revd Dr David Court
Acting Bishop of Lincoln




The Rt Revd Dr Nicholas Chamberlain
Bishop of Grantham



The Revd David Dadswell
Diocesan Secretary



The Venerable Gavin Kirk
Archdeacon of Lincoln



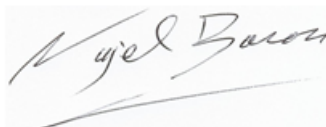
The Venerable Mark Steadman
Archdeacon of Stow & Lindsey



The Venerable Dr Justine Allain Chapman
Archdeacon of Boston



Mr Chris Clarke
Chair of the LDTBF



Canon Nigel Bacon
Chair of the House of Laity



The Revd Aly Buxton
Chair of the House of Clergy