

The Bishop in Canterbury

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To the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese
Cc'd Parish Treasurers

Dear Colleagues

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ Galatians 6. 2

Following on from my visitation address in which I spoke among other matters about partnership and generosity, I have been asked on a number of occasions how we might give some effect to these claims on our Christian life. I know that the challenges and demands on each of our communities here in the diocese continue to ask much of us and I want you to know that I am alongside you as you face these. I know too, from my own experience, that when I begin to look outwards from myself, I do in fact receive renewed strength to work through the immediacy of my daily life and I pray you will find this true as well.

As many of you will have heard me say when I have reflected on my own journey under God, it is the relationships within our world-wide communion which give me most hope and encouragement. In that sense I have always known myself first and foremost as an Anglican before being part of this Church of England. Throughout my own Christian journey I have been privileged both to know and to be deeply refreshed by the relationships which exist between this Church of England and our wider communion. In each of the dioceses in which I have worked, it has been a joy to share in those vital and life-giving partnership links across the communion; links and partnerships which have brought us far more than we might ever be able to give to them.

So arriving here in the diocese and knowing that we are linked with the church in Madagascar has been a great delight. It has been a joy to welcome four of the bishops of that church here in Canterbury in these weeks and I hope under God to be able to visit the church in Madagascar in the summer of next year. I am deeply grateful for the work carried out under Colin Preece's leadership which sustains and develops those links. As you will know full well, the political and civil life in Madagascar is far from easy and yet the church remains strong and united.

The making of disciples is one of the first claims laid by our risen Lord on his disciples. Whenever and wherever we share in that ministry, through baptism and confirmation, the Lord does indeed add to our number and strengthens us in our witness and service. It has been a joy indeed in these early weeks and months to preside at confirmations across the diocese and to welcome those who offer themselves as ministers of the gospel.

As we make disciples in Christ's name, so we do indeed look outwards and so I believe we are called to thanksgiving and generosity. I would like to suggest therefore that the collection taken at every confirmation service from now on should be seen as a sign of our openness in partnership and generosity towards other brothers and sisters in Christ.

I would like half of each of the collections to go to the work of the church in Madagascar. This will be channelled through the work of the Madagascar Link Group and targeted with the support of the bishops of the Church in Madagascar towards the strengthening of their common life.

Parishes may pass on their donations for Madagascar via a secure online payment form: www.canterburydiocese.org/madagascar/donation or by sending cheques (made payable to Canterbury DBF Madagascar) to: Diocesan House, Lady Wootton's Green, Canterbury CT1 1NQ.

The other half I would ask be given to a charity or cause of your choosing, but again this should be seen as a gift of our church and diocese towards the strengthening of our wider common life.

In asking, I am only too aware of the financial stresses and strains which you already bear in supporting the life and witness of the church in our diocese. I am deeply grateful for that support, which in so many places is truly sacrificial.

My hope is that through the giving away of confirmation collections to the church in Madagascar and to the life of the wider communities we serve, many more of our people will know the joy of bearing others' burdens and open themselves to receive far more than we will ever be able to give.

I hope too that members of the wider community who come to share in this particular aspect of our discipleship will see our gifts as an active sign of our commitment to the wellbeing of others.

With my prayers and best wishes

+ Trevor