

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ.

As we approach the season of Christmas I find myself drawn more and more to the theme of generosity. In this Advent season Margaret and I have been supporting one of our parishes in their Reverse Advent initiative. Rather than opening windows of an Advent Calendar we have been challenged to put something each day into a box which will in due course be distributed to those most in need in that parish. The gifts will be sorted to meet as far as possible the particular needs of the recipient.

We have been stirred because God who shows himself to us in Jesus Christ is above all else a generous God. Generous in loving; generous in giving; generous in bringing light through his people to the darkest places of his world.

I welcome this opportunity therefore to thank you for your generosity. Generosity towards the needs of his world. My heart is warmed again by immediate responses from across the Diocese to my Advent Justice Appeal which will continue to support those who find themselves most on the margins of our society.

Thank you also for your generosity towards the support of our common life in the diocese. It is easy sometimes to think of the Parish Share only as a process to keep the structure of the diocese or of our local church on the road. For me the share is like the Reverse Advent. An opportunity to give so that other communities less fortunate than I am will be able to experience the light of Christ. As I go around the Diocese I am deeply humbled to witness at first hand your generosity; a generosity which is often costly and demanding.

It is in that context of generosity that, together with my senior colleagues, I want to address the very real concerns which have arisen in a number of our communities over the projected level of Parish Share for the next years. For reasons which I will try to explain, the Parish Share rises for next year have been in the range of 3-6% and it is understandable that there is a feeling that they are running above inflation and are difficult to afford in a time of continuing austerity nationwide. Unfortunately the Diocese does not have any reserves which can cushion parishes against increases of this order.

I want to reassure you that throughout the whole budget-setting cycle the decisions that have been taken have not been taken lightly but have been taken in the context of a diocesan strategy which is itself a response to the growing and serious challenges that the Church of England faces nationally and locally.

Through our national programme of Renewal and Reform the Church of England is seeking to face some of the major issues which confront us as Church today:

- The need for us to reach out more imaginatively to younger generations.
- The reality that the age profile of many of our congregations is becoming increasingly older.
- The challenge to address the fact that over the next five years or so over 40% of our current stipendiary clergy will retire.

Here in the Diocese we have not only been aware of these issues for some time but have been actively addressing them through our three key objectives of:

- Growth both numerical and spiritual

- Reimagining ministry
- Building new partnerships with our communities

As I am sure you are all aware we have been refreshing these objectives more recently under the theme of “**changed lives -> changing lives**”. The Diocesan budget from which the Parish Share allocations have devolved finds the resource for our Diocesan strategic initiatives and momentum. All that we have been about at Diocesan Synod these past 18 months has been concerned with building the connections between all parts of our life - including finance. That’s because within our 2018 diocesan budget lie many aspects of our responses to the challenges we face.

The 2018 diocesan budget was this year constructed with a greater level of scrutiny from members of the Finance and Assets Committee – a group of people consisting of clergy, treasurers and finance officers from local parishes, and was then approved by the Diocesan Synod. It resulted in an overall average 5% increase in costs driven primarily by the following:

- An increase of 2.9% in clergy stipends to bring them up to the national stipends benchmark – thus reversing a period of around five years when Canterbury has fallen behind the benchmark.
- A 12% increase in the cost of our training curates if we are to aspire to meet the national targeted increase and ensure the diocese enjoys continuing well trained ordained leadership into the future.
- A 6% increase in ministry training costs generally, reflecting the costs of the increased numbers of ordinands in training and the desire to widen the scope of essential lay ministries.
- A 12% increase in safeguarding costs, reflecting an increasing caseload for the team and national requirements for more comprehensive training and policy development.

I thank God that we are already beginning to see some of the first fruits of our endeavours. Thus we have the largest number of men and women training for ordained and lay ministries at any point in our previous history. The age range of those training absolutely affects our commitment to address the needs of the younger generations who we seek to serve.

We fully accept that the communication of these increases could have been better. **To this end it has been agreed that the Senior Staff will engage with deanery synods early in 2018 to discuss the financial challenges facing parishes and the diocese and how best to respond to them.** It is expected that these will be open deanery synod meetings. We will also conduct a review of the financial sustainability of Parish Share in the New Year. Please be assured that every effort will be made to minimise future Parish Share increases, whilst at the same time not wishing to lose our momentum in responding to the challenges that we all face.

Generosity and the facing up to the reality of the challenges that we as a Diocese face are not polar opposites but reflections of the one true God who not only revealed himself to us in his son Jesus Christ but also showed us the cost of discipleship on the Cross. We trust in that same faithful God who gives us our daily bread even when the going gets tough. It was a joy therefore to see so many participating in the Diocesan Day of Prayer as we sought to commit all that we are about as a Diocese to God - including our finances and trust in him for renewal amongst us.

With my prayers and blessing,

Bishop Trevor