



THE BISHOP OF CHESTER

May 2018

Ad Clerum

I enclose a paper which Bishop's Council has authorised for wider discussion in the Diocese. An electronic copy can be downloaded from the diocesan web-site. Its contents should be self-explanatory, and it serves two basic purposes.

The first is to enable the Diocese to take stock after a long period of transition from the situation 20 years ago, when the Church Commissioners met half the stipend and pension costs of our parochial clergy, to the current situation where all costs are met by the Diocese, almost entirely through parish share contributions.

While there are considerable financial challenges in prospect over the next few years, it is good to report that for 2016 and 2017 the main DBF accounts showed a small surplus on ordinary activities, and our parish share collection rate has reached our initial goal of 95%. There are, nevertheless, substantial financial challenges in prospect over the next few years, especially due to the increased number of stipendiary curates which we plan to train, in line with national policies.

As explained in the paper, our financial structure is quite closely tied to the inherited parish system, with new initiatives largely emerging locally from within that structure.

Looking at 'renewal and reform' initiatives in other Dioceses, it is important to ask whether our current structures are adequate to meet the challenges and opportunities which are before us.

The second purpose is to propose that we set up a five year Development Fund, with a suggested allocation of £250,000 pa. We hope this will be largely fundable from the current surplus which we have generated on our Pastoral Account (from sale of parsonages, glebe etc). Historically, the Pastoral Account has been used as a general strategic reserve against large unbudgeted costs, and also for capital initiatives (eg the refurbishment of Foxhill 15 years ago, or the more recent construction of Church House).

The paper contains some suggestions about the potential use of this new Fund, and careful thought will be given to how potential bids are adjudicated.

Chapters, Deanery Synods, PCCs (where desired), and other diocesan bodies, are asked to discuss this paper, and to send comments to the Diocesan Secretary by 31 October. These will then be considered by the new Bishop's Council at its inaugural meeting early in December.

I hope that our discussions will also contribute to wider debates about our diocesan strategy, and will inform the process of appointment of my successor in 2020.

Bishops Keith and Libby join me in wishing you every blessing in your ministry.