



## The Diocese of Lincoln

### A Letter from the Bishops

19 May 2021

Dear friends,

We write to you in the time between Ascension and Pentecost, during which we prepare for the festival of the Holy Spirit and pray for the coming of God's kingdom.

Last Sunday, in worship many of us perhaps prayed the Collect: 'we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us'. We will also have heard Jesus' beautiful prayer that his disciples may be 'protected ... in your name' and 'sanctif[ied] ... in the truth' (John 17.12 and 17.17). These words, delivered first to the small discipleship group who were on the verge of being drawn into the drama of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, now resonate over time to us, as, together, we seek to be faithful disciples today.

Having celebrated the resurrection afresh, we now look forward to the fulfilling of Jesus' promise that we will receive the Holy Spirit again. The coming feast of Pentecost will equip, encourage and strengthen us, because Jesus will send us too 'the Spirit of truth', who 'will guide you into all truth ... and will declare to you the things that are to come' (John 16.13). All that we are and all that we shall be is held in God's providential grasp: The hopes of our nation, trying to emerge from the Covid pandemic, yet deeply mindful of the continued ravages of the virus around the world; God's people struggling with poverty, injustice, prejudice, climate change; and ourselves as a diocesan family, taking stock of the fact that Bishop Christopher has announced his retirement and also of the decision that Diocesan Synod took on Saturday 8th May about Resourcing Sustainable Church. And it is with this last subject in mind that we write to you particularly today, both to share next steps with you, and to offer you our commitment to work with you to implement Synod's decision.

Attached to this letter, in case you have not yet read it, is the full document **Resourcing Sustainable Church: A Time to Change - Together**. This report, the result of so much work, prayer and consultation over the last two years, involving very many people, was debated by Diocesan Synod 11 days ago. At the end of the debate the following motions were put, all of which received very strong (more than 80%) endorsement:

'That this Synod:

1. receives and welcomes the report *Resourcing Sustainable Church: A Time to Change - Together* and commends it to the diocese;

2. accepts the report's recommendations 1-15 and directs the Bishop's Council of Diocesan Trustees and the Diocesan Secretary to proceed with their implementation;
3. endorses the commitments set out in the report and requests all ministers and PCCs of the diocese to join with it in abiding by them.'

For that strong endorsement we are very grateful! Now the hard work of making all of this real needs to begin...

What we do not have is a 'top-down plan' into which we all need to fit. Resourcing Sustainable Church: A time to change - together is more a set of principles outlining a way of working that we want to put into practice together, over the next months, in conversation and dialogue with each other, as we seek a way forward for us to see our diocesan vision of being a 'healthy, vibrant, sustainable church transforming lives in Greater Lincolnshire' being made real in every single corner of the diocese.

If you have not yet read the report we suggest that you might start in the first instance with its early sections: the introduction, the fifteen recommendations and commitments, the conclusion, and the section that we have called 'Frequently Asked Questions'. Please also look at the two brief timetables before the appendices which begin to set out what we believe are some of the immediate next steps to take. Alternatively, you might like to listen to the interview that Bishop David gave with Radio Lincolnshire, available on the diocesan website, which gives a good flavour of many of the issues involved:

<https://www.lincoln.anglican.org/news/diocesan-synod-approves-resourcing-sustainable-church>

We know that you might not choose to read the document in full, and that you might think it too long to share with your congregation and wider community. Therefore, a much simpler version of Resourcing Sustainable Church: A time to change - together is about to be produced for the people of our parishes and communities. An Implementation Group is also being formed, and a more concise timetable, with next steps for us all and helpful resources for our parishes, is being assembled. We will share these developments with you as soon as they are finalised! Our hope is to get a simple communication for distribution in parishes, and further clarity around next steps to take, produced and distributed by the end of the month.

Meanwhile, we recognise and rejoice in the fact that some parishes, benefices and deaneries have already enthusiastically begun their own informal conversations in the light of their own understandings of Resourcing Sustainable Church, and hope that these documents will further aid these first conversations, while also beginning to shape the more formal conversations which we see as taking place with each other over the remaining part of the year. – This is a vocational process for us all, and one that will develop its particular flavour over time. Finally, we want to acknowledge that for all those who find Resourcing Sustainable Church energising and exciting ('at last, something is being done, we are facing reality'), there are others who find that the Recommendations and Commitments, for differing reasons, create anxiety and uncertainty.

Our pledge over these next months is to do our best to work with everyone. We affirm everyone's right to have their views and opinions. No-one will be judged for speaking their mind. As with other aspects of our life together as Christians, it is the quality of the love that we have for each other in God that will define us to our neighbours.

We began by commending Jesus' prayer and teaching in John 16 and 17. We would like to end by referring to an earlier part of the Farewell Discourse, the picture that Jesus paints in John 15 of the pruning of the vine to make it even more glorious and fruitful. This, we believe, is a helpful picture for us as a diocese now. It is encouraging and challenging, filled with love and rooted in truth. We look forward to working with you in the adventure that lays ahead and we hope that you will join with us as we pray for the Holy Spirit, because: 'you did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last' (John 15.16).

+ Christopher Lowson :

The Rt Revd Christopher Lowson  
Bishop of Lincoln

+ David Court

The Rt Revd Dr David Court  
Bishop of Grimsby

+ Nicholas Chamberlain

The Rt Revd Dr Nicholas Chamberlain  
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