

8th October 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

A CALL TO PRAYER AND GENEROSITY

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

These words of greeting from Paul's letter to the Philippians express so well the gratitude we have for our partnership in Christ. Since the lockdown began in March, we have watched how our parishes, congregations and ministries have sprung into action with newfound energy, live-streaming services, delivering shopping, medications and food parcels, organising phone trees and connecting by email, phone and Zoom meetings. The labours of all our clergy and lay leaders in these difficult times have been truly inspiring. Thanks be to God for you!

Having said this, Covid-19 has exacted a considerable toll on us all - the pandemic has caused great harm, physical, mental, emotional and financial. We have all been profoundly affected by this virus. At the same time, medical staff and key workers have responded with remarkable generosity and courage. We continue to pray for all those in such positions and ask the Lord for an end to the pandemic, the invention of a vaccine and the restoration of ordinary life.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been a financial picture which is hugely challenging. It looks as if the diocese will have a £1.9 million shortfall this year, due in large part to parishes unable to meet Parish Share commitments because of the loss of income from buildings being closed, fund-raising events cancelled and fewer church services.

We are doing all we can to mitigate the effects of that shortfall in terms of streamlining central services and rigorously controlling expenditure. We have also been successful in a bid to Church Commissioners who are providing £600k to this diocese, but that still leaves a £1.3 million shortfall. If that shortfall is not addressed, the consequences in terms of the mission and ministry of the diocese, the number of clergy posts and resourcing the local church will be severe, just at a time when we have an opportunity to offer so much to a county facing such challenges.

These are extraordinary circumstances, and the need is immediate and pressing. We are all called to take responsibility in our day for the flourishing of the Church's ministry and mission and the time to take that responsibility is now. If ever there was a rainy day, this is it, and so we appeal to you and to every person who is involved with the church locally to consider whether this year you might increase your giving. We ourselves as bishops have done so, and indeed are holding each other to account for doing so.

To those benefices which look set to achieve their Parish Share payments

We are hugely grateful to the two-thirds of benefices in the diocese who look set to achieve their Parish Share payments. We are incredibly inspired by the determination and creativity we see throughout the diocese to meet this challenge. However, these are extraordinary circumstances, and the need is immediate and pressing. So, we are writing to ask you as churches and individuals to consider giving even more generously this year than in previous years, as we are all participating together in the mission of God in the world. We are aware that many have in times past given generously and are already giving sacrificially presently, but these are exceptional times.

To those benefices which are struggling to make their Parish Share payments

We know the other one-third of benefices are struggling to make their Parish Share this year, and we have been really encouraged to see some of the creative and innovative ways you are seeking to do this. We have been particularly struck by the ways in which parishes are seeking support from their wider communities. We want to encourage you as churches and individuals to do all you possibly can to achieve your Parish Share payment. The consequences of us not doing so we know will be dire. We may feel reluctant to ask people to increase their giving at this time, but unless we ask, we cannot discover the generosity in people's hearts.

There are, of course, different ways of giving, and both of us want to encourage you all to sign up to the Parish Giving Scheme and then secure as many donors as possible on the scheme. This is the most straightforward way to support individual giving. Contactless card readers are important too, as well as the more familiar standing orders and various means of one-off donations. We ask that the clergy and lay leaders keep reiterating the different methods of giving available. We attach here a range of other suggestions for fundraising.

And for those of you for whom this feels difficult, you can find here the well-known spirituality writer Henri Nouwen's powerful little book, "The Spirituality of Fundraising." It has helped us both, and we hope it will help you.

Most importantly, prayer must be at the heart of everything we do. We are calling on every parish to join us using this prayer, for our church, that we grow in trust in God's providence and deepen our own generosity giving of ourselves and of our gifts.

Loving God,
you are always with us,
and give us all we need to be your Church in Suffolk.
Help us, we pray, to give as we have received:
abundantly, generously, and joyfully,
that our worship and our service
may bear witness to your Kingdom of unfailing love.
In the name of your Son who gave himself for us,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Please use this prayer at home and at every act of worship from today until All Saints' Day on November 1st. Please share this appeal as widely as possible.

We pray that you keep well and safe, and that we all emerge from this pandemic more deeply committed to our Lord and one another. And once again, our thanks for our partnership in the gospel.

Grace and peace,



Bishop Martin



Bishop Mike