

April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Dear friends

I am taking the unusual step of writing direct to as many of our faithful and regular church members as I can because we are in unusual times.

As you will know, the Diocese has been running at a significant financial operating loss for several years. We are once again facing an operating loss in the region of £1,000,000 for 2025. That equates approximately to the ministry costs of 15 full-time stipendiary clergy.

This is a source of great anxiety for everyone from parish treasurers and clergy to the Finance Committee of the DBF and the senior staff. Sadly, it is the inevitable result of decades of declining numbers attending church and giving sacrificially of their money to the work of God in local parishes. The pandemic only accelerated matters.

We are, however, fortunate that our predecessors invested for the future. Across the diocese, in some places more than in others, unrestricted financial reserves are high – very high in some cases. The Diocesan Board of Finance also has financial reserves. Our predecessors made provision for years of need. Friends, those years of need have arrived.

We need to consider the very real consequences of not releasing some of them now. The DBF has been using funds generated from other sources to invest in stipends and will continue to do so for as long as it can, but we need that releasing of reserves to be matched by similar action from PCCs.

We are doing all we can centrally to retain our current numbers of frontline stipendiary clergy. We realise cutting clergy numbers would risk hastening the decline which none of us wants to see. To cut more posts in the Diocesan Offices would be to reduce the support available to local parishes at a time when the challenges are higher than ever.

We are delighted to see so many coming forward to be trained and commissioned as lay leaders in our parishes. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:12, the work of ministers is to release God's people for acts of service. However, for there to be vicars to oversee mixed ministry teams of self-supporting clergy and lay leaders, who share the life-transforming power of the gospel, we need to be able to pay their stipends.

I firmly believe our current financial challenges are, at their root, spiritual challenges. We need God to move us from a mindset of scarcity to a mindset of generosity. That will take courage.

We need courage at every level of our diocese to release a planned percentage of our reserves each year, until other giving increases, to sustain our stipends fund. At the same time, we pray and work for the growth of God's church in our diocese and for an increase in regular giving.

Considering these challenges, I am calling a day of prayer across our diocese on **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May**. There will not be centrally organised events on that day. We are simply asking every person connected to our parishes to set aside time that day to pray for God to release and provide the finances we need to sustain and grow our ministry. It may be that you wish to organise a prayer meeting or simple informal service in your parish or benefice. We shall be providing prayer resources which can be used by individuals and groups – look out for details in eNews and on our website.

We need to pray earnestly and collectively for God to move by his Holy Spirit to provide the resources we need for the mission he has called us to in 2025 and beyond. Some of you may wish to fast for at least some of the day (unless medically unable to do so) as well as to pray – that too is a biblical pattern for God's people in times of need.

As I close, I offer you two Scriptures to inform our prayer that God will provide the finances we need and the growth of his church that we long for. In the first from the Old Testament, God's people faced almost certain defeat in battle. The other, from the New Testament, where God's people who were struggling were encouraged to remember the example of those who had gone before them, and to act in the same spirit of dependence on God in a time of uncertainty:

Our God ... We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. (2 Chronicles 20:12)

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. (Hebrews 11:13)

By God's grace we too now need to make bold decisions and pray for the strength to build for a future that is not our own. Know that I pray for you as I ask you to pray for me.

#### **A prayer for generosity:**

Our gracious Lord and loving heavenly Father, whose mercies are new every morning;  
who has shown us infinite generosity in Christ;  
we pray that your Holy Spirit would ignite that same generosity in us now.  
The challenges we face are great, but your grace and strength are greater.  
Help us to look to you for wisdom and courage  
knowing that we are called by you to be your people here, now, for this time,  
to plan, work, pray, and give for the time that is to come and the people who will follow us.  
Release and provide the resources we need now for the future you are building,  
and may your kingdom come and grow among us day by day.  
We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord  
who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Jackson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**The Right Reverend Richard Jackson**  
**Bishop of Hereford**