

The Venerable Phil Andrew and the Venerable Hilary Dawson
Archdeacons of Cheltenham and Gloucester
Mrs Julie Ridgway Head of Finance
Mr Colin Rank, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance
March 31st

*To Clergy, Church Wardens, Treasurers, Deanery Treasurers
and Deanery Parish Share Officers*

Dear Colleagues,

Over these past days our first priority has been to ensure that all our worshipping communities feel supported and have necessary information relating to pastoral care, worship, occasional offices, church buildings and governance.

However, we have also been receiving questions relating to finance, particularly parish share, and know that for many of you this is a source of worry and anxiety. It is clear that our financial position as a whole diocesan family is under pressure and therefore we need to work together to find ways of living in a financially sustainable way today, and in the longer term. We have seen some wonderful acts of generosity in this past week, as some communities seek to give more parish share than they had originally committed to, out of concern for the family as a whole. We know too that every worshipping community is seeing a reduction in income, and that some are struggling to maintain their parish share contributions. This struggle might be as a result of:

- 1) Loss of 'plate' giving due to the suspension of worship in the church building.
- 2) Loss of income from church and hall hire.
- 3) Loss of income due to fundraising.
- 4) Loss of giving related to individual changing circumstances.

Loss of income from hall hire is difficult to address. However, there are ways we can tackle loss of income due to regular 'plate' giving. Some worshipping communities are encouraging those who give through envelope schemes to continue to do so (safely) even though they are not able to attend church in person. Other communities are asking all those who can, and have not yet done so, to move as quickly as possible on to the Parish

Giving Scheme or other forms of regular planned giving. Some individuals might be willing to increase their personal giving to support those who long to continue giving, but whose family circumstances have been radically altered. Similarly, even though many fundraising activities are being cancelled, it might be that those who would have attended or supported them might be willing to pledge or give donations as the year continues in order to support their local churches as they seek to reach out to love their neighbour and serve their communities.

We have been asked if the parish share system can be 'suspended' for the time being. That is just not possible as the stipends of our clergy and the delivery of local ministry depend upon it. We often speak of saving for a 'rainy day'. This is the rainy day. Parish share giving enables a living Christian presence in all our human communities. It also enables our clergy, Readers, licensed ministers and many others to minister across these communities to those who are lonely, sick, isolated, dying and bereaved. Never has that need been more urgent. Covid-19 is making us think differently about how we live as Christians and how we live as worshipping communities. We want to thank the worshipping communities who give parish share so generously. We also want to encourage worshipping communities who might need to look again at the reserves and funds they have and prayerfully consider what level of reserves they really need to maintain.

We are very aware that parish share is only one aspect of our shared financial challenges at this time. Some PCC's may also need to reflect on other aspects of expenditure, including those that employ staff. The government's scheme allowing employers to 'furlough' employees applies to charities and may be pertinent here. Judith Knight has produced a helpful advice note which is attached to this email and available on the Diocesan Website.

If you are worried about finance please contact us. Both Archdeacons, and Julie Ridgway and her team are committed to offering any support we can. We can plan with those who need to adjust their giving in the short term – either by making smaller contributions, or larger ones. And we can, of course, continue to support everyone in planning for the medium and longer term through stewardship resources and financial advice.

Finally, we are aware that some clergy, church wardens and treasurers are feeling a great personal strain due to the financial situation of their worshipping communities. Please remember that responsibility for our finances is a shared endeavour and that you are not alone. Together we will care for one another, and together we will find ways of living faithfully and responding to God's call and God's love.

Amongst our prayers in these deeply challenging times, we pray that together we might continue to respond to the God of unbounded grace and generosity, and that we might find afresh the truth of Jesus' words that it 'is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35).

With thanks, good wishes, and prayers
Phil, Hilary, Julie and Colin