

October 2025

For Clergy, Church Wardens, Chaplaincy Secretaries, Diocesan Staff

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This letter comes with warm greetings from Bishop Andrew and me. In the Church's year we are in 'Ordinary Time', not because it isn't special but because its weeks are numbered with ordinal numbers. In the Godly Play curriculum it is referred to as the 'great green growing season'. We might think of the first half of the year, from Advent to Pentecost, as the Story of Jesus, and this second half of the year as the responsive Story of the People of God.

In this season we are, as a diocese, growing in all sorts of exciting ways. We had a bumper crop of ordinations in June. In September, we celebrated the graduation of a dozen students who had completed our lay learning course. And in recent weeks we have held energising synods for North West Europe, Germany and Northern Europe, Italy and Malta, and the East. Whilst numbers need to be treated with caution, the national church's statistics indicate that across the diocese attendances of both children and adults have been growing at a higher rate than nearly all other Church of England dioceses, which is something for which we can be deeply thankful.

To grow is to change, as Cardinal Newman (a scholar much concerned with determining the conditions for truthful doctrinal change) famously remarked, and we are in a season of some important staff change as a diocese.

- **Mike Fegan**, who had served as Chair of our Diocesan Board of Finance for 7 years left us in June, and Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint has accepted my invitation to be our new DBF chair. **Stephen Green** was formerly chair and chief executive of HSBC, is a former UK Minister of Trade and has written widely on European Affairs. He is also ordained. It would be hard to think of a more able person for this senior leadership role in our diocese, and Stephen is already proving a great asset to us.
- **Andrew Caspari**, who has been Chief Operating Officer and Diocesan Secretary for 7 years, will be leaving us in the middle of next month. Andrew has been a huge source of support to many of us in the diocese, and we will miss him very much. We plan to organise a collection to express our corporate gratitude to Andrew, the proceeds of which will go to a charitable foundation in which Andrew has a personal interest. More news on this in due course. The senior staff of the diocese will have opportunity to say their farewells to Andrew at an event in early January.

I am delighted that **Mervyn McCullagh** will be joining us as Diocesan Secretary and Chief Operating Officer in December when he will work with Andrew on the handover of his work. Mervyn is currently Director of Strategy and Global Change at Christian Aid, an organisation like ourselves with wide international reach. He has run a dynamic team with significant impact. Mervyn will be getting to know the diocese in the new year and will be at the Gibraltar Archdeaconry Synod in January.

- **Susan Stelfox**, our Head of Finance retired in June, after more than six years in the role. Susan brought a remarkable attention to detail and care for the financial affairs of the diocese. Susan's role has been filled by a new Interim Head of Finance, **George Ansong**, who will be with us well into 2026 when a permanent replacement will be appointed. George is already across all areas of our finances and preparing important reports for us.
- **Ella Sibley** joined us last month in a new post funded by the Church Commissioners as our Head of Strategy. Ella is already known to many of us through her previous role with USPG where she supported projects with refugees across the diocese. She is very welcome amongst us. She will be working closely with the DBF along with the Bishop's Staff and wider diocese as we develop ambitious plans for the future.
- **Mathias Weikl** has been working in our office in Brussels on a contracted basis. From November, Mathias will be Bishop Andrew's Interim PA and Lay Chaplain, and he will be pleased to hear from you if you are making arrangements with the Suffragan Bishop.

We are thankful that staff are now back in the offices in Tufton Street after more than two years in temporary spaces. Please continue to pray for our staff at a time of change.

I want to mention one particular event coming up very soon which is of real ecumenical significance. King Charles and Pope Leo are to become the first British monarch and pontiff to pray together at a church service since the Reformation. This historic moment will occur in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican on Wednesday during the state visit by King Charles and Queen Camilla. The service will bring together clergy and choirs from both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, of which the King is supreme governor. I have been honoured to be invited to this event, in the company of the Archbishop of York.

I know that high-level ecumenical events can sometimes feel distant and different from ecumenical realities on the ground. But I do hope that the pictures and publicity generated by this historic occasion will help many of us in the diocese be able to feel and communicate the great warmth that exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion in our local relationships.

I also want to take this opportunity to update you on **Living in Love and Faith**. Last week, the Church of England's National Church Institutions issued a statement about decisions made at the October meeting of the House of Bishops. Whilst final resolutions will be confirmed at the

House of Bishops meeting in December, it is not expected that matters will have changed significantly by then.

It has become increasingly clear that it won't be possible at the present time to secure the necessary majorities at General Synod to authorise either the use of bespoke/standalone services for those in same sex marriages, nor the ordination of people in a civil marriage with a partner of the same sex or for ordained ministers to enter into a same-sex marriage. This would involve such a high level of delegation of episcopal ministries as to cast into doubt our existence as a single church. One of the roles of bishops is to be guardians of the unity of the church. The House of Bishops has resolved that any further changes may cause greater disunity.

Equally, for the House of Bishops to have pressed on with further changes would have required far stronger theological consensus for this path. Theological exploration of the issues will no doubt continue, but that will not deliver change in the near future.

The LLF process and the discussions on these issues has continued over several years. There will be varying views as to whether the House of Bishops conclusions represent too much or too little change. What is clear is that some things have changed as a result.

For all clergy who wish to use them, The Prayers of Love and Faith are available now for use in existing services, such as Holy Communion or a Service of the Word. That will continue. Moreover, at the last General Synod there was near unanimity in replacing the outdated document *Issues in Human Sexuality*. New policies are already in train for the discernment of candidates for ministry using *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*.

The decisions reached include that, as no substantive change to teaching or doctrine is to be pursued at this time, no system of LLF-related delegation of episcopal ministry will be supported by the House of Bishops.

I know that there are a range of views and responses to this latest update. Some will wish for greater change whilst others are unhappy with what has been agreed. I remain deeply grateful for all who have engaged with the LLF programmes over recent years and thank them for the insights and wisdom they have brought to the deliberations. A whole range of hopes, anxieties and fears have been generated during this process. I appreciate that for some, engagement with LLF has come at great personal cost.

In this season may we be gentle with one another, and especially with those who are saddened or distressed by the outcome. I hope that we keep listening and learning from each other - which is one of the things that the process has been teaching us. If any of you wish to be in touch with me or Bishop Andrew to talk about this, please let us know and we will find time in the diaries. The Reverend Louis Darrant is our LGBTI+ Liaison Officer, and he is very happy to talk with anyone who wants to be in touch with him. Louis can be contacted via the diocesan website.

Every time one of our clergy or lay ministers is licensed they proclaim that they will both be loyal to the inheritance of faith and will proclaim the gospel afresh in our generation. The LLF process has throughout been endeavouring to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church, and how we may be built up in truth, unity and love – asking what should change at this time and what should not. The House of Bishops has struggled with this and has worked and prayed together over the past years seeking to reach a consensus. My belief is that whilst there are differing views across our diocese and across the church, our fundamental sharing in ‘one Lord, one faith and one baptism’ will enable our continued growing in unity and truth in the power of the Spirit.

May the Lord Jesus bless each of us and our chaplaincies as we continue walking together in faith.

Yours in Christ,

+ Robert Gibraltar in Europe

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