

15th May 2020

OPEN LETTER FROM THE CHAIR OF ST DAVIDS DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I am writing to let you know what financial support will be available from the Diocesan Board of Finance 'DBF' for Local Ministry Areas and churches as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

I send all of you, wherever you are, my very best wishes at this exceptionally difficult time. The speed and severity with which the crisis struck has been truly traumatic – none of us could ever have foreseen such dramatic consequences in our personal and working lives.

In addition to the terrible cost in human terms, the impact on our economy is already immense, and the after-effects will be felt for some time. Further, it is abundantly clear that many of our congregations are likely to be similarly devastated by this crisis and, as a Church Treasurer, I know that many of us are already feeling its effects in several ways.

The primary purpose of the DBF is to support Bishop Joanna and her clergy in the delivery of Mission and Ministry. As the crisis has intensified my fellow trustees and I have been coming to terms with what is taking place and identifying how we can continue to provide that support at this very challenging time.

"Business as usual" is impossible in the current circumstances but the Board's Crisis Management Committee is meeting fortnightly to lead us through the crisis and I will keep you up to date on progress as news becomes available.

I would like first to address the context in which the Diocese operates and seek to clarify some misconceptions about our financial position. It is often suggested that the Diocese has a significant amount of spare cash and reserves at its disposal. I regret that this is simply not true. We have no revenue stream from commercial activities and only minimal rental income from properties.

At this exceptional time, the Board looked to the Representative Body of Church in Wales 'RB' for support and to "share the pain" that we are suffering and will undoubtedly continue to suffer.

We appreciate the RBs response which the DBF has now considered along with the potential impact on our financial forecasts during the crisis and in the future.

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At its meeting this week the DBF approved the following package:

1. That all churches must pay Quarter 1 – many churches have already done this, and we thank them, but there were some who have not, and we encourage them to pay for Quarter 1 either in full or what they can.
2. The shortfall in Quarter 2 will be c £294,000. We recognise that churches will be unable to raise any income other than through standing orders in Quarter 2, so the DBF will absorb the cost, and no Ministry Share payment will be asked for in Quarter 2.

Any church that has paid Quarter 2 in advance, will have their payment credited to Quarter 3 for now.

The DBF have not yet decided on Quarter 3 or 4 as we will need to know what the RB will propose in further detail before we can responsibly do so. We encourage you to keep giving to your churches by standing order if you can or by using the envelope scheme and saving up collection for the day we are able to return to normal.

Some people might see Ministry Share as a payment in return for a service. Such a ‘commercial’ view of funding mission leads to the false conclusion that if churches are closed congregations needn’t pay for something they are not getting. On the contrary, such payments do not ‘buy’ ministry but contribute towards mission. That mission continues during the crisis and The Church remains open despite church buildings being closed.

There is an urgent need to minimise the inevitable negative effect on contributions this period of lock-down is going to have on the Diocese as a whole. I encourage you to continue giving as best you can in these unprecedented circumstances in order to sustain God’s beneficial work among and by us.

I assure you that my fellow trustees and I, who are each involved in the work of our own churches, understand your predicament. Our community is sailing uncharted waters and we intend to help you through difficulties not add to them.

I hope that this letter goes some way to assist you in planning your way through the crisis. The DBF seeks to work with you to balance your immediate needs and expectations, with our work to ensure the long-term health and robustness of the Diocese. It is critical that we can support the future of the Diocese for many years to come, and therefore to work together towards that end

I close by hoping that you all keep safe and wishing you all well.

With best wishes

Nick Griffin

Chair of the St Davids Diocesan Board of Finance.