

St Albans Diocesan Finances 2018 overview

Colin Bird, Chairman, Diocesan Board of Finance

The principal object of the Board is the promotion of the work of the Church of England in the Diocese of St Albans.

FY2018 benefited from increased investment income from our property interests, with total income up 9% on 2017. At the same time we were able to hold cost increases to 2.5%, driven by national increases in stipends of 2%.

Overall, our operational reserves at 31 December 2018 stood at 9 weeks operating expenditure (2017 – 8 weeks). This is still at the lower end of our policy range of 8 to 12 weeks but is a welcome improvement.

The support we provide to parishes in the form of paying for clergy stipends, housing, pensions and training is substantially predicated on parishes being able to make the voluntary contributions requested under the parish share scheme. Parishes responded well overall to the 2018 requests, with a 3% increase in the amount of donations, but there is no doubt that a number of parishes are finding their financial positions challenging. I am acutely conscious that the strain of keeping church buildings in good repair often detracts from parishes' ability to achieve our common vision for the church in the community.

We gratefully acknowledge the huge efforts from our church members in the parishes to continue to give generously to enable the parish contributions to be paid. These contributions are vital to continuing the Church of England's presence in the communities of the Diocese of St Albans through the mutual support which the parish share scheme enables. The Board is focussed on tight financial control of costs, but recognises that the challenge facing the church is the decline in members. Accordingly, we are supportive of the growth agenda being promoted by the Church of England nationally and in our own diocese.

The major focus of our efforts continues to be the support of our parishes and deaneries, schools and chaplaincies under Living God's Love which sees us Going Deeper into God, Transforming Communities and Making New Disciples of Jesus Christ. Of these priorities, the most challenging is that of Making New Disciples. To support all the work that happens to take this priority forward in our 'inherited' churches, as reported last year, we were awarded a five-year grant of £1.7m from

the Church Commissioners to resource our project 'Reaching New People'.

Under Living Gods Love, the aim of this work is to make New Disciples of Christ by developing new worshipping communities and fresh expressions of church and by equipping leaders. The project has touched most, if not all of our parishes, in the second half of 2018. Funding of £408,000 was recognised in 2018. External research on the impact of this project will be available in 2019, enabling us to fine-tune the projects delivery, which is scheduled to continue until mid-2022. Our challenge will be to support changes to the diocesan strategy and operations as they adapt potentially to a new way of working thereafter.

We acknowledge, with thanks, the support of our major external funders — the Church Commissioners for project funding, Allchurches Trust for support of our curates' programme and Hockerill Educational Foundation for support for our Diocesan Board of Education in its most important work in our schools. Above all, we give thanks for the magnificent efforts made by so many people to support the flourishing of the Christian faith here in the Diocese of St Aibans.

The operations of this diocese are complex and many faceted. As I start this triennium as Chairman, I have been impressed by the commitment and skill with which those who work in the diocesan office conduct their roles and I would like to take this opportunity to thank on your behalf our Diocesan Secretary, Susan Pope, and all her staff at Holywell Lodge for all they achieved in 2018 and continue to do on our behalf in 2019.

