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From 9 June to 9 July 2020, acting as
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9 June 2020

Dear Friends

I hope that you have been able to see and enjoy the Diocese's video tribute to Archbishop John Sentamu¹ as well as the Church of England's national Sunday morning service at which he was the preacher². He and Margaret will leave Bishopthorpe with our love and our prayers. Along with the farewell gift to which many people and parishes contributed, a large number of accompanying messages have been passed on to him.

Dr Sentamu's successor, Bishop Stephen Cottrell, will legally become Archbishop of York on 9 July and will be communicating with us very shortly after. It will be some time later when he is able to take up his regular duties.

In the intervening month, I am holding the responsibilities of diocesan bishop on an acting basis. Day-to-day pastoral matters that you wish to refer to a bishop should be directed in the first instance to the suffragan bishop in each archdeaconry: to the Bishop of Hull for the East Riding, the Bishop of Selby for the Archdeaconry of York (during the vacancy, including the Deanery of York), and to me for Cleveland. Correspondence that would come formally to the Archbishop in his diocesan role should be sent to Bishopthorpe.

Thank you so much for your faithful determination to keep the life of the Diocese in good heart during this time of anti-virus restrictions. There are many wonderful stories of inventive online worship, engagement in community support work, and – this is so important – simple loving pastoral care and Christian neighbourliness that essentially needs no more advanced technology than the telephone.

We yearn for the time when we shall be able to gather in our church buildings. It is being more generally realised now that that will not be simple, nor can it happen all at once. There is regularly-updated national guidance³ about planning to pray and worship safely in our church buildings. I hope that we would continue to see any remaining scientifically-based

¹ <https://dioceseofyork.org.uk/news-events/news/o-praise-god-in-his-holiness-a-video-in-celebration-and-thanksgiving-for-the-ministry-of-archbishop-sentamu/>

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online>

³ <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

limits to our activity as a wise way to care for one another and for the general public. There is a separate note on the diocesan website about this: but please remember that no-one must feel under any pressure to open a church for prayer before it is practicable and safe to do so.

The normal summer ordinations of new ministers have been postponed. Those who were going to be made deacon will instead be licensed remotely as lay ministers (and receive any stipend and housing as planned) from July until it is possible for them to be ordained in York Minster, which we hope will be in late September. The services to ordain new priests will be held around the Diocese in parish churches, and again, we hope that they could take place in the autumn.

Church life in future will be different, and at this stage we do not know how different. This is something about which we need to speak, at both parish and diocesan level – always with prayerful confidence and not anxiety. If we have concerns or if we have seen opportunities, they are best spoken about so that we can share one another's hopes as well as burdens. The bishops and archdeacons will be engaging particularly with Deanery Leadership Teams to explore how we might meet the opportunities and challenges with courage and hope.

Yes, the different future will have some good aspects that we bring from the present uncertainties. People who have not been churchgoers have experienced prayer and worship online. Where the Church community has responded to need by loving service in God's name, many will have known afresh that they are valued – this at a time when a rightful insistence on human dignity and equal worth has been worldwide news. When the time comes to look back on these months, there will be themes and activities to think about continuing in some form, and we shall need to think about how we can create the capacity to do so.

There has been pain and difficulty though, as we all know. There have been sad and sometimes premature deaths, with families and friends prevented from mourning as they would otherwise have done and as the Church would have enabled. Some people – I expect some of you reading this message – will continue to have concerns about resuming normal activities because of concerns about infection. You may simply have found these last months surprisingly exhausting. This is perfectly natural, and with my bishop and archdeacon colleagues I would encourage you to be thinking about how you carve out time and space to recover your energy in the coming weeks. We all need to support one another practically and in prayer, and to be sensitive to factors affecting others' lives that they may not be able to discuss openly.

It will not surprise you that there is great uncertainty about the financial effect of everything to do with the virus upon parishes and the Diocese alike. I believe that over the last years the way we speak about money has been moving in the right direction. Money used wisely makes it possible for the church life and mission that we want to see become a reality. I cannot tell you how grateful the whole leadership team is for the disciplined, prayerful,

joyful, generous giving on the part of individuals to their parishes, which is reflected in parishes' giving to the Diocese's common fund through the Freewill Offer. Fulfilling the offer is something that we know parishes see as a matter of honour – again, thank you – and we know too that it is distressing to parishes when they find they cannot do that, or when a year-on-year increase is impossible.

The virus has produced financial uncertainty for individuals and institutions, and our parishes and Diocese are no exception. The time will come when the process for setting the diocesan budget for 2021, including next year's Freewill Offer, will need to start: but a pause is being placed on that, simply because at this moment many parishes are finding it impossible to know how their own financial situation will be affected by Covid19 in the medium term. More information on the budget process will be sent in due course. Meanwhile the Generous Giving and Stewardship Team will continue to be in contact with parishes to support you in practical ways in improving your local financial situation.

I cannot conceal the fact that any reduction in the Diocese's shared economy can be expected to have direct consequences, in central support services as well as paid ministry. This is not the place to go into detail: but as a diocesan family we all need to appreciate that decisions about expenditure, including the timing of filling paid posts and their overall number, have to be made with an eye to what is affordable and sustainable. This is in the context of holding to the principle of mutual support,: in other words, the core cost of ministry should be pooled at diocesan level.

None of this should be seen as a one-sided negative message: through our mission initiatives, *Multiply* and *Mustard Seed*, we are learning the possibilities of different patterns of ministry – lay and ordained, full- and part-time, paid and voluntary – and many deaneries are putting together imaginative ideas that meet local situations in our very diverse Diocese. Discerning how we follow God's call to be his Church and do his work, in a new future, in something in which we shall each, without exception, have a part: and I hope that we shall approach that with the conviction that God equips his people with gifts for all that is needed.

This message comes on behalf of the whole diocesan leadership team with enormous appreciation for all that you are doing. Please pray for Bishop Stephen and his wife Rebecca as they prepare to join us. This comes with my prayers, and the prayers of my bishop and archdeacon colleagues, for you all and for everything we do to share in being Christ's disciples and ambassadors.

Yours sincerely

+ Paul Whitty