



A letter from Bishop Stephen to licensed clergy, LLMs, clergy and LLMs with PTO, parish officers and congregations

Dear Friends

This week, the week before the holiest week of the Christian year, will see the fourth anniversary of the Covid lockdown. It is hard to believe it was only four years ago, as so much has changed in this period. The effects of the lockdowns on us all, and particularly on children and the vulnerable, will be with us for years to come. The Church is still emerging from the effects of closure and in many ways will not be the same again either.

As we enter into Holy Week, we see that those following Jesus were confronted with the same reality of change and things never being the same again. The 'Hosannas' of Palm Sunday quickly give way to the confusion, betrayal, injustice, and agony of the following days. As we come to terms with the fact that 'it is finished' (John 20:19) on Good Friday, we find ourselves at the open tomb on Easter morning. From this moment on, things will never be the same again, but the one constant that we will always have is hope. The hope that is the risen Christ with us; the hope that we are a resurrection people following the risen light of Christ out into the world knowing that as we walk together through the challenges of our age, nothing – not pandemic, war, political strife, or division – will overcome His risen light and our call to make him known. This is our living hope.

Church Commissioners

I want to share with you in this letter that I have been appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury to be deputy chair of the Church Commissioners. All diocesan bishops get a national role, and this is to be mine. The named chair of the Commissioners is the archbishop, but the deputy chair bears the responsibility for leading in this area, so most of the work will fall to me and the excellent staff team. Though it is a significant responsibility, it has been many years since the role has been taken up by a bishop of a largely rural diocese and I am pleased that I will be able to speak from this perspective.

Please be assured, that my heart and my ministry will always be focussed here, in the diocese where I was raised and grew in faith. I will not be distracted from the value of local mission and ministry.

The Church Commissioners exist to support the mission and ministry to the Church of England, in a large way through the wise investment of and distributions from the CoE investment fund and is

governed by statute. It is an in-perpetuity fund that can produce significant funding for the life of the church both now and in generations to come. Currently, the Commissioners are providing about £400 million per annum, £3.6 billion over nine years to support local parishes and the front-line work of the Church of England – a 30% increase over the last funding period. In Salisbury Diocese, we are working hard to submit an application in support of our vision and strategy to be presented to the “Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board” of the Archbishops’ Council later this year.

My first meeting in the chair for the Church Commissioners included hearing the report of the independent oversight group which was asked to help shape the response to the fact that research has showed that the Commissioners’ fund has historical links to African Chattel Enslavement, which was an abhorrent sin. The Church Commissioners announced last year that it is allocating £100 million from investments to transfer into a new endowment fund, as you may have heard. It is a way of investing, not simple expenditure, and it is to be spread over the same period as the £3.6 billion I just mentioned. The independent oversight group proposed an ambition for this to grow to £1 billion, an ambition that the Church Commissioners share, in order to bring healing, repair, and justice. The aspiration is that this is achieved through partnership with other organisations, Individuals and institutions internationally who wish to use their investments to build a new future for communities ravaged by transatlantic chattel enslavement are already indicating their commitment to follow this lead.

I know the figures involved have alarmed many who are struggling to make ends meet and pay for current ministry. It is really important to note that this fund is not derived from parishioners’ money, but from the Church Commissioners fund which invested in slavery through the Church Commissioners’ predecessor, Queen Anne’s Bounty in the 18th century. While we rightly commend the role that the Church of England played in abolishing slavery, and do not apologise for spreading the Gospel, we must not allow this to close our eyes to the fact that the Church was also complicit in enslavement and profited from it. Some of these historic funds made through the sin of slavery will now be reinvested to support projects which unleash people’s potential and bring new hope, a potential denied by the sin of slavery.

Changemakers in our elections

Diocesan Synod is made up of ordinary people who are committed to sharing the news of Christ's transforming love with our communities. It is where important decisions which affect the life of the church in the diocese are discussed and agreed. Elections will be held in May and June for new members of synod and we are running a campaign to encourage more people to think about standing. Lay members need only be over 16 and on a church electoral roll to stand.

Synod representatives come from every part of the diocese, which stretches from the North Wessex Downs to the Channel Islands. Synod needs to be represented by all the voices of those the Church seeks to serve across the community – whatever age, gender or lived experience. When we don’t hear from everyone, we are diminished and less able to serve the whole people of the diocese. Being a member of synod also develops skills in shaping policy, advocacy and debating. Find out more about Church Changemakers [on our website](#). Parishes will be sent information packs after Easter with resources, including videos and social media posts, to share with congregations.

Sharing the vision events

In May and June I, Bishops Karen and Andrew and the archdeacons, are hosting four events to explore the Making Jesus Known vision and its five paths. These will also be opportunity to hear more about the new Share model which will be introduced in 2025. You are invited to register your

interest for the dates on this [form](#). Do come to whichever is most suitable. I hope to see as many people as possible at these events, which I hope you will find encouraging and supportive of your mission and ministry.

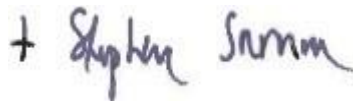
First safeguarding audit

In April the first new national safeguarding audit of dioceses, cathedrals and bishop's offices will be published. Salisbury is first out of the 42 dioceses. Safeguarding is a gospel imperative and should always be victim focused and trauma informed. I am grateful to our safeguarding team for their dedication and professional rigour. Please do seek out the report on the diocesan website and consider it in terms of your own benefice provision. The safeguarding team are readily available if you have any questions or if concerns arise.

Holy Week and Easter

This Holy Week I shall be in both Guernsey and Jersey, leading the clergy and all those who minister there in renewing their ordination vows, and then in the cathedral on Maundy Thursday for the Christ Eucharist. I shall also be visiting the Christians on board the Bibby Stockholm to pray with them, and then back in your cathedral on Easter Day. As I travel round, I shall be praying for all those parishes and schools in our diocese.

May the God of hope be with you this Holy Week and Easter. My thanks for your partnership in the Gospel.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Stephen Lake". The signature is written in a cursive style.

The Rt Revd Stephen Lake

Bishop of Salisbury

P.S. Remember – the clocks 'spring forward' on Easter Day!