

From the Diocesan Secretary

Hopeful realism?

David Pain writes:

While I was preparing for Easter, we had the auditors doing their annual 'visit' to Church House. What a great combination!

There is something refreshing about an audit process – perhaps every Lent should include one. Everything in the last financial year is looked over, the reality of the resources available to us and our management of them is being examined. The reality of the challenges we face are laid bare, as in the desert light.

Our year end report is likely to show that we had an operating deficit of £1.5m. Yet despite all the challenges of 2020 parishes were able to pay nearly 90% of the Share requested towards the costs of parish ministry and the other costs of the diocese. 2021 will be our fourth year of a substantial deficit, budgeted at near £2m. Things are going to need to change. Our five-year financial framework gives us a road map for reducing expenditure and/ or increasing income and soon we will need to develop a budget for 2022.

At the same time as undertaking a deeply realistic audit, we are preparing a hope-filled giving campaign. In each local church we will need to attend to the mechanisms for giving, make sure we are clear on our impact and ensure we are growing trust in the church locally and collectively. Briefing meetings held for clergy and other ministers in recent weeks have included inspiring testimony from those who have had the confidence in all humility to step forward and to invite and ask people to give to the work of their church as an integral part of their response to a generous Easter God.

The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Plan, which will be discussed in deaneries in coming weeks includes a number of discussion questions:

- How might ministry & mission be imagined or arranged here more fruitfully, fairly and economically?
- Where is God growing new things - and what might need cutting back?

In the next season we will need to attend carefully to these. We have the opportunity to approach them with hopeful realism. The reality of our Lenten audit, and the hope of the Risen Jesus Christ encountered by the disciples will be our guides.

David Pain

March 31st 2021