Church House

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4th November 2024

Dear Friends,

The Diocese of Leeds is now ten years old. I am incredibly thankful to everyone who helped established the Diocese and I’m very confident about our future as we go forward together.

In our diocese there is ministry by remarkable people in all settings, from inner cities to small market towns, and villages. This is the Church of England at work on the ground. From Barnsley to Richmond, Huddersfield, Wakefield and Bradford, right up into the Dales, our parishes reach into every sort of community imaginable.

Across the 440 parishes there's a huge variety of ministry offered by 310 stipendiary clergy and curates, as well as all kinds of lay people. Children and young people are supported by the Diocese in 236 schools - a huge number of schools, both primary and secondary. And our churches are involved in working with them, for the sake of the future of our children. We had 3,000 baptisms, 900 weddings and 5,000 funerals. These are not numbers for numbers’ sake. Each number shows the church engaging in the stuff of people's lives. But of course, to be able to do this, we have to be able to resource it.

Parish Share is our largest source of funding by far. All the money received though share is spent directly on having clergy in our parishes. In 2023, Parish Share provided £12.1 million of our total income of £20.4 million, but that was £1.8 million below the figure received in 2019.

Still bearing the cost of COVID and in tough economic times, the Diocese has a rolling deficit of £1.3 million.

Currently, we balance the books by selling properties, using reserves and constantly reducing operating costs. This is obviously not sustainable, and so we encourage everyone to be generous in order that we can shape parish ministry positively into the future.

For a decade we have worked to create confident Christians, because they will grow churches that will benefit society. That's the simple dynamic - confident Christians, growing churches, transforming communities, in a complicated world.

To do this, we need confidence. We need confidence in our mission that we know what we're about. We need confidence in the future, that we're not just for the here and now. This means that we invest in children and young people, in trying to resource our clergy and parishes, so that we can build not just for a secure future, but for a bold and visionary future, one that is not afraid of the world in which we live.

Our missional initiative, Barnabas: Encouraging Confidence, is not a tick-box exercise to make us feel better. It's about asking; “What do you need to grow in confidence so that your church can grow, so that we can achieve more in our parishes?” Every parish is unique, and Barnabas, supported by the National Church, aims to meet your specific needs with real help and advice.

We know the challenges, but I’m hugely confident of the opportunities for the gospel of Jesus Christ in our special part of the world.

Thank you for your generosity and your giving. Thank you for all the mission and service in the Diocese of Leeds.

I pray that God will bless you as we work together for the sake of the kingdom of God in this place.

**+Nick**

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**Rt Revd Nick Baines**

**Bishop of Leeds**