

**24 March 2020**

To all Treasurers and Churchwardens.

We are in the early stages of thinking through the immediate and longer-term financial issues that will be arising in parishes and the Diocesan Board of Finance. This will impact all parishes, but some will be much more impacted than others. This will be particularly difficult for parishes that:

- Have low levels of reserves (including investments);
- Have a significant proportion of their giving through open plate collections or envelope schemes;
- Are dependent on fundraising activity; and
- Have significant income from hiring out their church or church hall.

Dioceses around the country are in contact about what may be done to help, and there are some useful ideas emerging. Similarly, the National Church Institutions are looking at possibilities.

Head of Finance, Nigel Strange, Assistant Accountant, Sharon Taylor-Booth, and I have started thinking through how we might help treasurers and parishes at this time with what we can do locally. We have so far agreed the following:

- Monthly remitting of fees forms and sending of any fees (no doubt much reduced in any case) on to the DBF can pause for the duration of the current crisis. Please keep a record of amounts and we will collect over an appropriate period once the crisis has passed.
- We intend to continue to pay our clergy, do urgent and essential housing repairs, and maintain our support to parishes as best we can.
- We are urging parishes therefore to continue to pay their parish share as far as possible via the direct debit scheme, standing orders or direct cash transfers. Over 80% of DBF income comes from parish share and we need payments to continue as far as possible to continue to pay clergy stipends, clergy pensions, urgent housing matters, staff costs and other continuing payments.
- If parishes are completely unable to maintain payment at current levels (for example as a result of the above) please contact us so we can collect a reduced amount. Please do not cancel your direct debit.
- Please do not post cheques to Church House at this time as banking is now proving more difficult.

- We will be using what remaining limited DBF reserves there are. We urge all parishes with reserves to do the same. If any of you have a “rainy day fund” now is the time to use it.
- We will be minimising DBF expenditure. For example, by not carrying out any non-urgent housing maintenance.

Nigel, Sharon and I can continue to be contacted using our normal email addresses. You can also email [finance@chester.anglican.org](mailto:finance@chester.anglican.org) and all three of us will be monitoring that account.

It will take us a bit of time to resolve things and at present we are concentrating on getting as many as possible Church House staff working well with each other offsite so we have good foundations to build on for what might be a longish period. It is going well; many staff are now online and working from home details can be found [on our website here](#).

You may wish to contact regular givers using the numerous new communications methods we are all learning. People cannot act if they don't know there is a problem. Use your communication channels to inform church members of the very real financial challenges we face. Ask God's people to pray and to act. You may want to ask those already giving using standing order to consider increasing their giving to help fill the gap. Similarly, it may be worth asking those who give by envelope or open plate to consider setting up a standing order to the Church. Sensitivity is important; for some, uncertainty, job insecurity or very low income makes this very difficult. Any communication should acknowledge this. For many others, this is not an inappropriate request, and many will step up in support of their church and Christian friends.

Standing Order givers can amend their gift online or via telephone banking.

Those with access to internet banking can also make direct donations; they will need to have the required bank details: Church bank account name, bank name, sort code, account number (which you may want to ask them to contact you by phone to obtain, we don't recommend putting them on websites or other public platforms unless you have a collections account). Ask people to add their name to the payment reference so that you can record the gift and claim Gift Aid if you hold a declaration.

Some of you may be concerned about our deadline for submitting annual accounts. If so, please don't worry as [APCMs can now be deferred until the end of October](#) and we will not be chasing accounts until the end of the year. Those of you registered with the Charity Commission will need to keep an eye on when they expect to receive your accounts as their deadlines might be earlier.

We will continue to send out period financial updates using the E-Bulletin / Coronavirus Briefing bulletin, the website and other potential communications methods we are considering.

We have already done some initial very rough and ready modelling of various scenarios in terms of parish share and it is going to be tough, but I am confident that if we all work together the diocese will get through this financially.

Please do keep in touch with us. It will be more important than ever that we all work together to get through this. My prayers are with all of you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Colville". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

George Colville  
Diocesan Secretary