



23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021

Dear Friends,

I wanted to start by thanking you all for the support for one another I have witnessed over this past week. I realise we are all still coming to terms with the news of +Tim's retirement, yet I have been struck by the resilience of our faith, the strength of our partnership, and our overriding commitment to the Diocese's parishes and communities.

It has now been formally confirmed that I will serve as your Acting Diocesan Bishop. I find this humbling, but also a great privilege. There is no doubt that I will continue to need your prayers over these coming weeks and months, and my absolute priority is to ensure that your ministry and work across Winchester continue to flourish.

I will, of course, have the counsel and experience of the Bishop's Staff Team to rely upon. Bishop David is due to return to full-time ministry in September, and a new additional face and name for many of you will be +Richard Frith, former Bishop of Hereford, who is offering his support and experience as a recently-retired diocesan bishop. I am grateful that I will be able to count on his wisdom. In addition, a number of you will already know Bishop Geoff Annas, Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Diocese, not least due to his recent role in the Petertide Ordinations. I am glad to say that +Geoff will continue to provide additional episcopal resource, particularly with licensings and other services.

I realise all of this represents considerable change, and new ways of working for us to embrace. However, we are embarking together on a new chapter for the Diocese and I know that members of the Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod will be focused on the opportunities ahead in upcoming meetings.

With the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions on Monday, we have entered a new stage on our journey through these difficult times. I know that many of you will have mixed feelings about the lifting of restrictions. Although we are all hopeful about what this will mean for our churches – as limits on communal worship and life events are lifted, and our buildings can once again be filled with the song of our congregations – many of us may feel some trepidation. Cases of the virus are on the rise and, while the vaccination programme has been successful in reducing the number of hospitalisations and deaths, sadly these too have increased recently.

With the removal of legal requirements, the onus of responsibility for keeping our congregations safe has shifted onto our local church leaders. I know that this added responsibility is likely to weigh heavily on us all. New guidance to help churches navigate the current situation and with respect to risk assessments is available on the [National](#)

**Church** website. You know your congregations and your communities well, and we will support you in the decisions you take to keep them safe. If you have any queries or concerns, please discuss with your Area Dean or contact Richard Brand as Archdeacon and, as ever, the whole Bishop's Staff Team is committed to supporting local decision-makers through this difficult period.

With our prayers for you all,

**Bishop Debbie**

**Andrew Robinson**, Diocesan Chief Executive

**Catherine Ogle**, Dean of Winchester

**Richard Brand**, Archdeacon of Winchester

**Mark Collinson**, Director of Ministry

**Mat Phipps**, Bishop's Chaplain

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