

September 2026

Dear Friends

Thank you for your continued giving to the life of the diocese, through service, financial commitment, prayer and the use of time and talents both in the church and out in our many local communities. We continue to be thankful for all contributions towards our shared vision, particularly through Parish Share, which we are renaming the Shared Ministry Fund, in order to more accurately characterise its purpose. This goes entirely towards licensed and commissioned ministry, enabling us to meet the needs of the cure of souls across a large geographical area, specifically through training, housing and the payment of stipends (our main expense).

I am grateful too for the hard work of our DBF and staff that has gone into the 2027 budget guide. Despite the uncertainty and upheaval of this year, we have been working hard to form an integrated financial plan based upon support for local ministry, which enables our common mission whilst being realistic about contributions from our parishes. The plan emphasises integration and collaboration between benefices and deaneries and between lay and ordained.

The 2027 budget guide explains our work going forward and I commend it to you. It sets out a clear plan where all ministry – present and future – within parishes, benefices, mission hubs and areas rural, urban and suburban, as well as areas of deprivation, is supported through a Shared Ministry Fund, augmented and enabled by external funding.

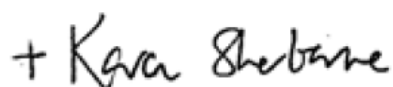
Our vision is that the cure of souls remains our priority; that everywhere across the diocese, there is active mission and ministry provided by every Christian sharing their gifts and working together for a common purpose: being the Church in every place. That requires both pragmatism and realism. Currently, giving from parishes does not meet the cost of 150 stipendiary clergy, causing us to be honest and realistic about the number we can afford. A reduction to 120 by 2032 reflects this and the predicted number of fulltime vocations there will be in the future. However, this will not mean the Church stops growing, because God

appears to be developing shoots in other directions, including a growth in self-supporting ordained and LLM ministry and the development of a variety of new ministries, including children's and family workers. Without this blend we could not fulfil Christ's mission.

This plan envisages fewer paid clergy, but we have committed to ensuring they are better housed and resourced. Those who bless us with their gifts as retired, self-supporting ministers and commissioned lay ministers, sustaining our worship, pastoral care and sacramental ministry, also need increased support, encouragement and training.

We have significant challenges ahead as we change patterns of ministry and learn to work in different ways, utilising the gifts that God has given us. This budget guide reveals a desired commitment to make Jesus known in a way that is sustainable, biblical and above all joyful in encouraging us all to continue to play our part. It is an ongoing call to generosity, mutual support, love and service as a response for what God has done for us.

Thank you



Karen Sherbone

Bishop of Sherborne and Acting Bishop of Salisbury