



**THE
DIOCESE
OF
BLACKBURN**
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE

The Bishop of Blackburn
The Rt Revd Julian T Henderson

To all licensed clergy, churchwardens of vacant parishes and treasurers.

9th November 2020

Dear friends

Later this week, on Thursday the 12th November, the Call to Pray and Give initiative will begin, lasting for two weeks. The purpose of this letter is to detail the resources which will be available to assist you in making the most of this opportunity and show you where they can be found.

First I want to explain why the diocese has chosen to take a lead on this diocesan initiative for parish funds. I am aware through conversations with a number of you that the closure of churches and other factors, like reduction in rental income from church halls, have led to a shortfall in income this year. This has led to difficulties in paying parish share in some instances, or to the use of reserves to do so. This diocese wide appeal for parish funds is designed to make up this shortfall, as the stipends fund is very much reliant on parish share to resource the mission and ministry of this diocese.

As such, all funds will go to the local parish church for you to decide what the best use is for this financial boost. If your income has been reduced by the closure of churches, or you have had to use reserves to pay your parish share then this can assist in balancing the books. If you have not been greatly impacted or have already paid parish share you may wish to contribute more to the diocesan stipends fund to help churches who cannot afford to pay for the cost of their ministry. The choice is, of course, yours.

A team of clergy and lay people in the diocese have put together a suite of resources which should help you make these two weeks as significant as possible. A new page on the Diocesan website has been created and you will see 'A Call to Pray and Give' as a title and it will be live tomorrow. This will be your one stop shop for all of the resources but there will be other things to look out for:

Daily evening prayer

A different member of the Bishop's Leadership Team will lead Evening Prayer at 7pm every evening via zoom. The hope is that this will become part of a pattern of prayer for people and whilst I know it will take commitment and sacrifice to attend frequently it is a good practice and little sacrifice compared to what people have had to make to pray around the globe today

or throughout history. To sign up to this please email secretary@bishopshouse.org.uk and Jennie will email you links for these sessions. Bishop Julian will kick things off at 7pm on the 12th November. This is open to all but please be careful how you distribute the joining details and do not post them on open media.

Daily pause and pray resources

You will find a set of prayers and psalms to help you pause and pray in the morning for each day during the call to pray. As with the Evening Prayer, each day is linked to a deanery of the diocese and throughout the fortnight each parish will be prayed for by name.

Resources for children and young people

Videos have been made to help children and young people in their thinking about prayer and about giving. These will be found on the website throughout the week, premiered at different times on YouTube and advertised through social media. They can be used at home or with online youth groups.

There will be written guides to how to make the most of these resources made available and a podcast to go alongside these.

Theological reflection

We have two fantastic theological reflections which should challenge and develop our thinking on prayer and giving. These can simply be distributed widely or can be used for study and discussion groups online.

Tracking answers to prayer

We would love to hear your stories of how prayer has been answered during this two week period. If you have any answers to prayer, however big or small, please email them to beingwitnesses@blackburn.anglican.org and let us know whether we can share the story or if it just for our encouragement.

Diocesan Daily prayers

These have been re-written to reflect the aims of the two weeks. This might be an opportunity to encourage people across the diocese to sign up online to receive the Blackburn Daily Prayers going forwards.

Gift envelopes and cards

Gift envelopes and cards, which will help with gift aid, have been distributed to Area Deans or in the case of some deaneries to willing volunteers. Each member of clergy or Churchwarden of vacant parishes can go and get 100 of each (roughly) to then be further distributed to parishioners. You can contact your Area Dean for details unless instructed otherwise. Thank you to all those who have helped with the distribution.

You may need to think about how these resources can be further distributed to your congregation. The envelopes have the prayer written specially for this period of prayer on it and as such will be a good prompt to remind people to pray. Churches are still allowed to open for private prayer, and advertising that these resources are available at the back of church for example would not be outside the regulations. Keeping contacts with the materials to a minimum and making sure you do not encourage gathering is important, but distributing these resources should and can be done safely and well in your own context.

You will see on the envelopes that the gift day was due to take place on the 29th November. This was our opportunity to make a one-off sacrificial gift to the Church at this time of crisis. However, the crisis has caught up with us once more and our church buildings will sadly not be open on this date. We will therefore aim to hold the gift day on the first Sunday we are allowed back. We want to believe that this will be 6th December. So let's pray with that date in mind and during our two weeks of prayer set aside the gift we believe that God is calling us to give. As such it will have an added element of being a thank offering at a time when we can celebrate being back together again in person. And it is my hope that we shall be able to collate how much has been given in response to this appeal across the diocese and announce the total before Christmas.

Whilst picking up these envelopes, a number of you will also be able to pick up the Advent 2020 resources which have been ordered. These look great and are a fantastic resource which guides us through advent with a thought for the day each day until Christmas, written by 27 different clergy from the diocese. It is not too late to contact Siobhan using siobhan.trickett@blackburn.anglican.org to order some for your church or for staff at your church school. Those that have not been distributed must not be allowed to sit unused in the diocesan offices during Advent. They are really good and they are free!!

I pray that these two weeks of prayer will be a real blessing to your congregations and your local communities, as we see answers to our prayer and as we listen to hear God's voice, giving us the gift of giving, releasing funds for His work in our parishes and giving Him the glory He deserves throughout the Diocese of Blackburn.

As ever

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the name 'Julian'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.