The Acting Bishop of Lincoln

Pastoral Letter – June 2026
Deanery developments

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

New deaneries

On 1st July a number of our deaneries will merge to form new deaneries. I wanted to write to share with you what is happening and to invite your prayers for the people and parishes who are forming these new relationships.

As part of *Time to Change Together*, we have been looking at the diocese through the lens of Deanery Partnerships. These are based on the current local authority areas and have helped us to re-picture our patterns of mission and ministry.

The nine Deanery Partnerships are: North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire, West Lindsey, East Lindsey, the City of Lincoln, North Kesteven, South Kesteven, the Elloes (South Holland), and Boston.

Within these Partnerships, the constituent deaneries have remained unchanged. However, over the last year or so, some of the deaneries have voted to unite with their neighbours, to create larger units in which the sharing of gifts and resources might be more streamlined.

Every deanery has been invited to consider its future, in the same way that every church was invited to discern its calling as a Celebration Church, a Community Church, a Local Mission Church, a Key Mission Church, or indeed whether it wishes to explore closing as a place of regular worship.

The Bishop's Staff have been prayerfully considering the expressed wishes of each deanery, and on 1st July we will implement a new pattern in accordance with local wishes. The following deaneries will be uniting:

- Haverstoe with Grimsby and Cleethorpes
- Horncastle with Bolingbroke
- Graffoe with Lafford
- Grantham with Loveden
- Elloe West with Elloe East

In these new deaneries, there will be a coming together of Deanery Synods and Deanery Chapters. Other deaneries continue as distinct units, yet still within their wider Deanery Partnership.

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Local leadership

Each deanery has a Rural Dean, sometimes supported by Assistant Rural Deans. Deanery Synods elect a Lay Chair, an important representative office, and will continue to do so.

In 2022 we began appointing Partnership Deans and Lay Co Leads to shape and promote the local vision for collaborative mission and ministry under *Time to Change Together*. In various times of need, our Partnership Deans have also become known as Assistant Archdeacons.

As we begin this next part of our journey, we want to simplify these titles and patterns of local leadership. Going forward, the intention is for each Deanery Partnership to have a single Area Dean and a Lay Dean (the new name for Lay Co-Lead) – senior lay and ordained leaders working together. Area Deans will hold office in each deanery in their area (whether one or more), and in many places will share their responsibilities with Assistant Area Deans.

In many ways, we are already familiar with these patterns, with rural deans appointed jointly in places like North East Lincolnshire and the Elloes. After 1st July, when some deaneries unite and new forms of leadership begin to be rolled out, we will publish a directory of who is holding which role in which Deanery and Deanery Partnership.

I shared this direction of travel with Diocesan Synod in April, but I wanted to write to you now, before the changes take place, so that you can get a sense of what is going on.

My commitment to you

When we began the journey of *Time to Change Together*, we made a commitment to seek to honour local values, opinions and relationships. Structures were to be organic, locally owned and accepted, rather than 'top down' and enforced. The pattern of Deaneries and Deanery Partnerships that will begin from 1st July honours this commitment.

However, it has become clear over the last few years that some parts of the diocese have worked faster than others to explore and to inhabit the new way of structuring mission and ministry that locates parishes within Local Mission Partnerships and Deanery Partnerships. Sometimes this is because of geography or other unavoidable circumstances, such as unexpected clergy vacancies. Whatever the cause, the result has been that some parishes have been left wondering about who is to be their incumbent and oversight minister for a long time now. This has understandably sometimes had a negative effect on morale, and I apologise to these places - and to the diocese as a whole - for the impact that this has had on you.

Five years ago, when we began this journey, we sought to recognise the ministerial and financial realities from which we cannot shy away: there is an insufficient supply of potential incumbents to meet the needs of the whole Church of England, and so we are competing with other dioceses for clergy, and if we cannot pledge sufficient money to pay clergy stipends, then we will be unable to appoint in many places as well. These realities have only become more acute, and we must face them, urgently.

I see the creation of our new deaneries, and the simplification of local leadership, as part of a pattern in which we increase the speed at which we tackle oversight, deployment, planning and mission across the diocese as a whole. Bishop Jean's arrival means that we can begin to build the leadership teams for North and South that match our two archdeaconries of Stow & Lindsey and Lincoln.

Together, we will continue the work of renewing structures and relationships that is central to our shared life. St Paul's vision of the Body of Christ remains inspirational to what is now *Time to Grow Together*: we are all different; we all have gifts; we need each other. The whole will flourish as the parts flourish and the parts need to play their part in the whole, otherwise no-one will flourish.

Finally, I would like to thank those colleagues who have served as Rural Dean and Lay Chair and whose term of office necessarily ends because their deaneries are joining with their neighbours. I publicly thanked both current and former Rural Deans and Lay Chairs at Diocesan Synod, but I wish to put in writing my heartfelt appreciation of the dedication of many people in these roles over many years. The responsibility that is carried is frequently weighty, especially by Rural Deans, and on behalf of many parishes, parishioners, clergy and ministers, I am very grateful to you all.

With my thanks and prayers,



The Rt Revd Dr Nicholas Chamberlain
Bishop of Grantham
Acting Bishop of Lincoln