



August 2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into the harvest field.” Luke 10:2

As a convert to the Christian faith, my passion has been to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ. In parish ministry, I sought to lead churches where people could hear the Good News, deepen their faith and transform their communities. I have tried to encourage our churches to do the same in their tradition and their context.

Our society is in desperate need of God. Like the crowds Jesus encountered, people are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”. As I retire, the Church of England is rediscovering its mission to the nation. The harvest *is* plentiful and we have hope for the future. But we must face our challenges if that harvest is to be reaped.

The particular challenge I want to leave you with is to pray for, resource and release a new generation of workers into the harvest field and specifically those to lead our churches.

A growing and hopeful Church needs ministers, lay and ordained, with a deep faith who can lead in a changing and diverse world. It needs a wide variety of people and gifts to lead in different ways.

But it also needs *more* ministers: the workers *are* few and are getting fewer.

As a Church, we have underinvested in praying for and seeking out this new generation. We have also underinvested in funding their training and ministry.

In this Diocese, our previous approach to Parish Share, the way we resource ministry, intensified this. As parishes did not receive clear and equitable direction on how much to give, many unintentionally deprioritised their responsibility to fund ministry. The gap between Parish Share and ministry costs widened to £1m. To redress the balance, all parishes are now being asked to give at new levels to provide the ministry we need, both now and into the future.

How can you play your part?

Pray

Jesus tells us to ask God to send out workers. All vocation is the gracious call of God. We need to pray for Him to renew all vocations among the body of Christ.

Encourage others

Who do you see with the faith, character and gifts who God might be calling to ministry? Encourage them to use their gifts and explore their vocation.

Respond yourself

How are you responding to Jesus' call to follow Him? How are you following Jesus in the spheres of your life, loving God and serving others? Is God calling you to ministry?

Give

Put simply, parishes need more financial resources and to give more of them to Parish Share to invest in the ministry we need – an increase of £1m between 2015 and 2020.

- Every Christian can give sacrificially to their parish.
- Clergy and church leaders can teach about generous giving as part of discipleship.
- PCCs can review their approach to stewardship using Giving for Life, adopt a programme like Giving in Grace and maximise their income through effective Gift Aid processes and joining the Parish Giving Scheme.
- Finally, PCCs can respond to their Parish Share request in the light of the need, taking responsibility, being generous and having faith.

The Diocese of Bristol has a hopeful future. It has been a privilege to serve this diocese. As I work out the next chapter of my vocation, I will be joining you in praying, encouraging others and giving so that the plentiful harvest might be reaped.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The letter 'M' is large and stylized, with a small cross-like mark above it. The rest of the name is written in a cursive, flowing script.

Rt Revd Mike Hill
Bishop of Bristol