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THE ACTING BISHOP OF COVENTRY
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To all licensed clergy and lay ministers

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am writing this pastoral letter at a time of huge significance for us as a Church and as a nation. This past week has been full of extremes of emotion for many I suspect as we have received news of the US election, observed a season of remembrance, and are now hearing once more of the terrible harm and damage inflicted upon children and young adults, both here and abroad, by a church leader.

I imagine that some of you like me have been reading the Makin report over the weekend, detailing the abuse of John Smyth. It leaves us feeling both shocked and saddened by what it reveals of the failure of the Church to keep people safe and to address abuse when it is disclosed. No apology to survivors feels adequate. Words are not enough, rather it will be by our actions in change that true repentance will be recognised.

Please do be aware of the feelings this report stirs in you. Seek any help or support that you personally need. Such a report may result in further disclosures being made, so do share concerns with your parish safeguarding officer and be in touch with Sarah Price and the diocesan team as necessary; full details can be found on our [Diocesan Safeguarding Webpages](#). I trust that we will all commit ourselves anew to ensure that God's grace and love can be fully expressed through our actions of care and our determination for cultural change.

Secondly, you will be aware that our parliamentary representatives are discussing the possibility of a new bill on assisted dying later this month. Some of us may have experience of the death of family and friends which have influenced our views and our pastoral response. The desire for a good death is something which raises both ethical issues and many concerns for us to consider. There are the voices of those who feel vulnerable in the light of the changes proposed. In addition, we need to recognise that there are many who will have no freedom of 'choice' to make. Those of us who have a vocation in hospice ministry will know what a wonderful resource they are and yet receive little central funding, usually supported only by charitable giving.

I would encourage you to be prayerful for your MP and consider writing to them about your ethical views and opinions and encouragement for greater financial support for hospice ministry. Material to help you in your own thinking will be made available in this week's Wednesday Update or by request to the diocesan [Communications team](#).

On a personal note, I also wanted to write to thank you for the kind words and thoughts that you have expressed on news of my departure. I have now been here for a year in supporting the life and mission of the Church in this diocese. It has been an absolute joy! I have really valued being able to get out and about amongst you, visiting schools, licensing new ministries, and sharing in worship on Sundays, being able to see something of the amazing contributions that you each make to everyday life in your communities.

I have loved baptising and confirming so many fabulous and diverse people of all ages and backgrounds. Many have found faith in this past year or are discerning vocations to both lay and ordained ministry. There have been some deeply emotional moments as they have made these very public statements of faith and much of that is down to you and the welcome demonstrated by your churches and communities.

It has been wonderful to work with such a dedicated group of clergy and lay leaders. I have learnt so much from each of you and give thanks for having a share in the gospel of Christ alongside you. Thank you for all you have given me in support and prayer.

And now it is time to turn our hearts and minds to the next step of the journey. News of Bishop Sophie's arrival opens up lots of possibilities and hope for the future. It is a moment of great joy and opportunity for you all and I want to assure you of my continued prayers for you.

I will be returning to Bath and Wells to resume my role as Bishop of Taunton there. Bishop Christopher delegated responsibility to me for a year and that year ended on November 6th.

Archbishop Justin has extended that delegation until the end of the year in order that I can complete some tasks and finish my episcopal ministry here on Christmas Eve at the 'Form of a Servant' service in the Cathedral. This feels apt.

Bishop Tim Thornton will be offering support to the diocese in order to make a smooth transition whilst you await Bishop Sophie's installation. I encourage you to have patience in regard to episcopal diaries during this period. I want to assure you however, that where support is required and contact with a bishop is necessary that will still be available. I am very grateful that Christine has kindly agreed to defer her retirement in order to support the new Bishop coming in. I know her wisdom will be invaluable. Christine and the Archdeacon team will be able to handle any queries from yourselves in the intervening period as necessary.

As I close, I am reminded of these words spoken at our Remembrance service in the War Memorial Park this Sunday. '*Be still and know that I am God*'. May that phrase hold us in our grieving for those who gave themselves for our freedoms. And may it inspire us as we grieve all that we have failed to change within the Church and world, as yet, and see the hope that Christ's gift of love offers.

Brothers and sisters, I look forward to continuing to work with you over the next few weeks and assure you of my love and prayers for you all.

