

# The Bishop of Winchester

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The Diocese of  
Winchester



## OUR CALLING UNDER GOD

### A Pastoral Letter, on the Festival of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple 2007

to the Clergy, Licensed Ministers, church-wardens and members of PCCs and Advisory Councils of the mainland Diocese of Winchester and of the Channel Islands

Forty days after Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph bring their child to the Temple in Jerusalem for the purification of Mary and her child (Luke 2.22-38).

The old man Simeon meets them, takes the child in his arms and praises God in the lovely words of the *Nunc Dimittis*, greeting Jesus as “**a light for revelation to the Gentiles**” – Jesus who will in time say to his followers, “**you are the light of the world**” (Matthew 5.14).

And then Simeon blesses Jesus' amazed parents, and speaks to Mary words that go far beyond our usual understanding of light – and of Jesus - as gentle, warming and re-assuring - as we say, “sweetness and light”: “**This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own heart too.**” No wonder that for many hundreds of years the Church has read, alongside this Gospel, the prophet Malachi: “**Who may abide the day of his coming, who shall remain standing when he appears? He is like a refiner's fire..., he shall purify...**” (Malachi 3.2-3).

As the pattern of the Christian Year swings to look forward to the next “forty days” of Lent which will soon be upon us, the Readings of The Presentation direct the sharply revealing “light of Christ” on every aspect of us, our church life included. So this is an appropriate moment for me, as your Bishop, to render to you all something of an account for what many have been doing to take forward the intentions and hopes and decisions expressed ten months ago in that memorable gathering in St Swithun's School, Winchester, on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 to explore “**OUR CALLING UNDER GOD**” – intentions, hopes and decisions which were built upon the Consultations of the previous autumn and which, translated into a programme of work, were endorsed by the Diocesan Synod in May under four headings:

- Vocation and Ministry: to review the categories of licensed ministry, lay and ordained – their encouragement, discernment, training and deployment – to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of today's Church in this Diocese
- Leadership: alongside current provision for initial ministerial training, to provide specific training for Leadership, lay and ordained, in our Church communities
- Growth: to strive for healthy growth in personal discipleship, in our Church communities and in making new Christians, using Mission Audit everywhere and sharing its results with each other by Pentecost 2008
- Framework for Ministry: so as to ensure that our “frameworks” are flexible and appropriate to sustain growth, to review the size, structure, numbers and role of the Deanery to allow it to function as a source of mutual support and growth.

All this work is well in hand. The small groups responsible for each part of it are up to time and reporting regularly to the Diocesan Standing Committee and to the Synod; and I am full of admiration for the imaginative and careful work that many are doing, to further all this, on behalf of us all. We are arranging to draw it all together in a second (following that of April 1<sup>st</sup> 2006) Diocese-and-Islands-wide Consultation in the autumn (not now at Pentecost) of 2008; and this will be preceded in

Lent that year by a time of reflection; by a Day of Prayer across the Diocese; and by Lent Lectures given by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the course of a visit of a few days to the Diocese.

Alongside these is a fifth strand of work, begun a while ago, which will come to the Diocesan Synod this May: the re-imagining of what we have become used to thinking about as our “system of allocation” to each parish of its “share” of responsibility for the Diocese’s budget. How easily this kind of language has come to suggest to some of our people a kind of tax!

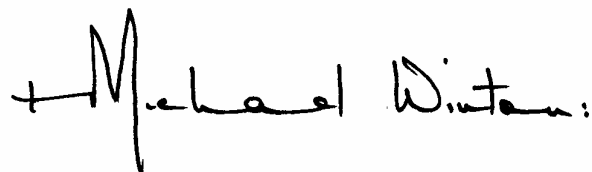
Our Diocese has very little in the way of endowment income (and here we differ from some of our neighbours). With other Dioceses across the south of England we receive very little indeed from the Church Commissioners – because the resources of the Commissioners, that are available to support basic Diocesan expenditure, rightly go to Dioceses in the poorer Midlands and North of England. So today we are responsible together financially for ourselves – as our ecumenical colleagues have always been; we are responsible ourselves for the financing of what we decide year by year in Synod to be “OUR CALLING UNDER GOD”. There is no-one but ourselves to fund this budget, no secret benefactor or capital fund to make up for whatever as a body we fail to provide each year in contributions towards our Diocesan expenditure. And if we fail to meet these financial obligations as we have defined them, we shall quickly notice the effects in every part of the Diocese, Mainland and Islands, in the shape of fewer, and less well trained and supported, stipendiary ministers, and church communities starved of the services that after years of careful reviewing our Synod has continued to judge that it should provide for them. This will be to fail in “OUR CALLING UNDER GOD” to be effectively and attractively “**the light of the world**” in every place at this critical time in our country’s history.

The Diocesan Synod will soon consider proposals of a kind that will encourage every parish, and each one of us, to view our giving towards meeting the annual budget of our Diocese as an expression of our being “**one body in Christ**” (1 Corinthians 12), as people “**bearing one another’s burdens**” (Galatians 6.2) and responsible for encouraging and supporting one another’s ministry and witness according to our means – Jersey and Basingstoke, Southampton and Lyndhurst, Eastleigh and Guernsey and Andover caught up together in making possible each other’s Christian growth. I pray that the excellent programme “*Giving in Grace*”, a gift (!) to the rest of us from the Diocese of Liverpool, is already helping many of our parishes and deaneries to re-discover this kind of fundamental Christian understanding, and to become more “**cheerful givers**” (2 Corinthians 9.7).

I write this letter to you at a time in our country’s life which I take to be one of opportunity and promise, and so of testing, for our Church and for all the Churches – and indeed for the other Faiths in this country too. We members of the Church of England in this Diocese owe it to Our Lord to be clear that we are not leading a parish, or a Diocese, to please ourselves; but because we are among the people whom God has caught up (Philippians 3.12) into following his Son Jesus so as to be agents of his recalling of his creation to praise and serve him and to grow like him. At a time when Government, pursuing a secularising agenda, is aggressively seeking to restrict the freedom of people of Faith to offer our vision, our convictions and our service into the public life of the country, it is more important than ever that every parish, and our Diocese as a whole, should be “fit for purpose” – the purpose that I and my colleagues summarised for us all in our Pastoral Letter of June 2004 and which some 600 of you developed so fruitfully on April 1<sup>st</sup> last year.

May the Lord Jesus be your, my and our Light in these next months, purifying and challenging us, encouraging us and leading us on, so that through our Churches and the Cathedral and through each of us the Light of Christ may shine clearly into the life of this country and of the world beyond it.

With my thanks, my good wishes and my prayers,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Winter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a cross at the beginning of the first letter.

February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.