



THE BISHOP OF BEDFORD
The Right Reverend Richard Atkinson OBE

Bishop's Statement on the appointment of a new Rector for the Benefice of Sharnbrook, Felmersham and Knotting with Souldrop

The Benefice of Sharnbrook, Felmersham and Knotting with Souldrop is part of the Diocese of St Albans, and is an enormously valued and valuable member of the Diocesan family. Sadly the last Rector moved on after too short a time and I am therefore looking for a priest to offer stability and renewed leadership in the Benefice. At the heart of the north of Bedfordshire it is a benefice that presents much opportunity, along with people who are marked by an eagerness to be the church in and across their area, honouring the traditions of the faith and the Word of God while engaging fully with the culture and the communities in which they are placed. The Bishop of St Albans and I expect its distinctive witness to continue, flourish and develop under the guidance of its new Rector.

This is a parish which has affirmed and has been blessed by the contribution of ordained women in public ministry, and the Diocese looks for this approach to continue.

One or two specific matters:

1. After extensive consultation, the Diocese is focused at this time on "Living God's Love" (www.livinggodslove.org). We are asking every benefice to address three themes: Going Deeper into God; Transforming Communities; Making New Disciples. Of course all our benefices are free to approach these themes in the way that seems right to them under God. But any priest accepting this post will commit himself or herself to engage with this initiative and to work with the people of the benefice to make sense of it in the life of the local church.
2. Within "Living God's Love" every priest is expected to work with their lay and ordained colleagues in the construction of a Mission Action Plan. Mission Action Planning is a tool to help each benefice listen to the communities in which it is set and to identify ways in which the Church can grow. The Benefice has engaged in the past with this process, but I shall look to the new Rector to carry the process forward and to renew the Benefice MAPs. Further information is available on the Living God's Love website. (http://www.livinggodslove.org/about/mission_action_plans)
3. As a Diocese we are committed to developing the ministry of all God's people. Any priest wishing to come and serve here will therefore be working collaboratively with ordained

Going Deeper into God • **Transforming Communities** • **Making New Disciples**

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and lay colleagues. A key part of his or her ministry will be to identify and encourage those who have the calling and the gifting to be ordained or to be lay leaders.

4. The spiritual and numerical growth of the Church is a priority for the Church of England and for the Diocese. We will help and support any new post-holder in the Diocese as they work to secure this growth in depth and in numbers, and we will act in partnership with them to ensure that they have the necessary training and equipping for this vital part of their task.
5. I expect that anyone appointed to this post will involve themselves actively in the life of the Sharnbrook Deanery, in particular of its Chapter and its Synod, and in the life of the Diocese more generally. It is expected that you will attend Diocesan Clergy Conferences as and when they are arranged. The Church of England needs to hear the wisdom and insight of the diverse community of strong and thoughtful people that this benefice contains. I look to the new Rector together with his or her colleagues and people, to be fully involved in the ideas, strategies and policies of the Diocese and of the wider Church of England, robustly offering his or her own wisdom and insight, and listening carefully to the wisdom and the insight of others.
6. The Diocese takes seriously the call on the Church of England to serve all the people of this land and in particular to be there for any who may need us at significant moments of transition in their lives. For this reason we expect our clergy to be wholehearted in their exercise of the "cure of souls" to all within their benefice, and to take responsibility for the provision of the pastoral offices to any who request them.
7. The Benefice is generous in its giving, paying its parish share in full and on time. The Diocese, and in particular those of its parishes in areas of deprivation, honours and values this commitment. I look to the new Rector to sustain and encourage this generosity in the future, teaching regularly on the principles and practice of Christian stewardship and availing himself or herself of the diocesan and other resources available for this purpose.
8. Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is a priority of the Diocese, as it is of the whole Church. The clergy of the Diocese receive regular training in this area, and anyone coming into the Diocese will commit themselves to undertake our diocesan training in their first year in post.

+ Richard Bedford.