



To Churchwardens & PCCs in the Benefice of South Leightonstone
By email.

11 January 2024

Dear Churchwardens and PCCs,

Yesterday I wrote to the PCCs in the West Leightonstone benefice to invite them to commence the process for appointment of a priest in charge. The letter informs them that the acting Bishop of Ely is nominating Rev Philip Howson as her preferred candidate for this role. I want to give you the background for this development.

As you know, Philip has been working with all the PCCs in your benefice and the benefice of West Leightonstone to develop the ministry that is available to children and families across both benefices. Central to this plan has been the appointment of a Children and Families Minister, for which the diocese has agreed that West Leightonstone Ministry Share contributions (which would have been directed to paying for ministry in West Leightonstone alone) will provide the bulk of the funding. This scheme depends on South and West Leightonstone benefices working together to grow the capacity of all the churches in the area to grow their ministry amongst families.

West Leightonstone PCCs have been considering various options for which body serves as the legal employer of the Children and Families Minister. It seemed best that this didn't rest upon a single PCC, so that the role was co-owned by all those PCCs that wished to be part of these developments. We have been advised that the only legal route for the creation of a Joint Council, that could become the employer, is if all the PCCs involved share the same incumbent. The appointment of Philip as incumbent (priest in charge) of West Leightonstone, if approved by their PCCs, fulfils this condition and allows the plans to progress between the benefices.

This is not the only reason, even if it was the reason that precipitated this development. Philip tells me that as he has prayed for and worked with the people in West Leightonstone, as both Assistant Rural Dean and as initiator of the Leightonstone Mission Area proposal, he has felt a growing sense that God is calling him into this role. He knows that it will bring extra demands, but he is confident that it will also bring extra resources, and, by God's grace, lead to growth of the church.

I am guessing that some of you will be concerned that his appointment (if it is approved) might mean that you will see less of him in South Leightonstone. Others of you may be concerned that Philip will have to carry additional pressures that are unsustainable. The Rural Dean, Duncan Goldthorpe, and I and the Diocesan Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry, Peter Leech, are all aware of the potential demands on Philip, and the way that it may shift his commitments. We are committed to support him and you in negotiating these changes. We believe that ultimately if Philip becomes priest in charge of West Leightonstone it will lead to growth in the church and the release of more ministry potential, which Philip reports is already happening.

It will mean that Philip will need to focus on his strengths and identify those who gifts better enable them to fulfil the ministry that God is calling them to undertake. This is the pattern of ordained ministry in all multi parish benefices: the ordained ministers developing the gifts and talents of all God's people, and only doing themselves those things that they are best equipped to do. We

believe that Philip's strategic leadership skills perfectly equip him for this role of leading across both benefices. It will be up to West Leightonstone to either recognise or disagree with this assessment.

Therefore I ask you to share your incumbent with West Leightonstone for the benefit of both benefices. I promise that his appointment will create the possibility of proceeding with employment of a Children and Families Minister, and that this resource will not be withdrawn by the Diocese for the duration of the period that Phil remains Priest in charge in West Leightonstone. Were the parishes of West Leightonstone to fail to provide their share of the costs of employing a Children and Families Minister, then we would not expect Philip to continue as priest in charge there.

When Philip leaves this appointment, the arrangement will be reviewed, and both benefices will be asked if they wish to continue.

If you have any questions or concerns about this development, I encourage you to talk with Philip, Duncan Goldthorpe, or myself. I realise that it would have been better for me to bring you this proposal in person, but the need for speed so that we can move forward the plans for employment of a Children and Families Worker seemed more pressing.

Thank you so much for the leadership and hard work that you give to caring for the churches in your benefice. I wish you a very happy New Year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Harlow". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long, sweeping underline.

The Ven Richard Harlow
Archdeacon of Huntingdon & Wisbech