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To the people of the Diocese of Lincoln:

I am writing during the season of Easter, as we look forward to the celebration of Ascension Day and to the gift of the Holy Spirit at Whitsunday, the first Christian Pentecost, to announce my retirement as Bishop of Lincoln on the 31st December 2021 – more than ten years after I took up the post on the 19th September 2011 and as I approach my 69th birthday.

This will be preceded by a period of study leave during October to December in which I will reflect on the last ten years of ministry. I will do this by attending a retreat and undertaking guided study.

Of course, there will be time later for me to give thanks and for others to reflect on all that has happened in the Diocese during these ten years – to mark what has gone well and what has not gone so well; more of that later.

I hope my farewell service will be in Lincoln Cathedral on Sunday 21 November at Evensong at 3.45pm – COVID19 permitting

I have not made this decision lightly, but after careful thought and prayer and after consultation with people of wisdom inside and outside the Diocese.

I have enjoyed my time as Bishop of Lincoln and will always retain an affection for this part of the world: its people, its history and its geography. I have been honoured to accompany many on their journey of faith through baptism, confirmation and ordination – that has been a great privilege. Susan and I have benefitted greatly from meeting countless lovely people. Greater Lincolnshire will always hold a special place in our hearts.

Why am I making this announcement now?

I wrote to you early in March and shared some of the circumstances surrounding my suspension and return to ministry. I don't need to repeat that now and I am very grateful for the expressions of welcome back and support Susan and I have received since then.

In my previous letter, I outlined that in the time I remained as Bishop I hoped to contribute in three ways:

First, my return would provide a space for my colleagues to be refreshed. Second, it would also provide the opportunity for me to look at all the work that has been done in relation to

the *Resourcing Sustainable Church* and third, it would provide an opportunity for me to play my part in preparing the way for the next Bishop of Lincoln.

These aspirations are on track: I have resumed my public ministry: liturgical, teaching and pastoral. I hope I have contributed with 'fresh eyes' to the recent stages of refining the proposals for *Resourcing Sustainable Church*.

But now we are moving into a new and important stage in the history of the life of the Diocese.

As you may know, there is to be a significant meeting of the Diocesan Synod on 8th May in which, after careful consultation, the Synod will decide whether to move forward with *Resourcing Sustainable Church*.

The Diocese should be aware of my intentions before I participate in that debate.

It seemed to me that it would be unhelpful if I were to put my support unequivocally behind this initiative – which I intend to do – only to announce a month or two later that I am leaving you get on with it without me! I think that would be to offer leadership on a false prospectus.

So finally, what does this mean for us spiritually?

We are approaching Ascension Day on the 13th May. This feast is the time we recall that the risen Christ left his disciples, having been with them mysteriously and intermittently for forty days. He did this, so that he could ascend to heaven and that the first disciples could take greater responsibility and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is a useful and relevant motif here: that, in order to become the person God has made us to be, we have to step out in faith. This is not easy in an increasingly alien and inhospitable world. But for us to have the confidence to do this, we need to remember and rely on God's love and open ourselves even more to God's grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And so, my prayer today is that the Lord Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended Saviour, will send us all the gift of God's Holy Spirit to continue to lead us into all truth.

+ Christopher Lincoln: