

Tuesday 2 July 2026

Dear fellow Governor,

I became a Governor of Clergy Support Trust almost twenty years ago, continuing my family's proud association with this remarkable charity: my late father had been, as Bishop of Bedford, chair of the Clergy Orphan Corporation. In 2018 I became a Trustee and, since 2023, it has been a huge privilege to serve as Senior Treasurer. Across those roles, I have been constantly struck by the charity's extraordinary history, and also the changing needs of our applicants in a world and Church which are very different from even a decade ago. Balancing our heritage with the needs of a modern, professional charity (informed not only by our past, but also by best practice in the wider voluntary sector) is a key concern for me as chair, one I share with the current Trustees and Chief Executive.

Last October, at the Annual Assembly, we presented proposed reforms to our 348-year-old Royal Charter – as has happened several times across our history. It was very good to hear views on the proposals from Governors – some firmly in favour, some less convinced – and our Chief Executive, The Revd Ben Cahill-Nicholls, has enjoyed developing those themes in one-to-one discussions with a number of you. Thank you for giving your time and wisdom to this exercise, which has without a doubt informed the Court's thinking and helped us to bring the Resolution on which you will be asked to vote, at the Extraordinary General Meeting on Thursday 23rd July. In this letter, I shall explain further the Court's thinking, in the hope that Governors will vote – in person or by proxy – in support of this continuing evolution of a much-needed charity.

And, to begin there, Clergy Support Trust does remain much-needed. Indeed, we are helping record numbers of people, in longstanding and new ways. In each of the past three years, more than one-fifth of all Church of England clergy have come to us for help. That is a vast operation compared, even, to the charity's work before Covid, and it requires highly effective, efficient staff and governance. More than ever, it is vital that the charity is professionally led and overseen, and that its governance is representative of the Church whose people we seek to serve, as well as furnished with the appropriate professional skills and experiences.

In reality, and as I outlined in my letter to you last summer, Governorship – for all its advantages – does not provide that level of guarantee. Whilst many Governors

have, of course, superb and relevant skill-sets, and are deeply supportive of the charity's ethos and work, a model which is reliant on Governors for its ultimate decision-making, but when there are no qualifications or levels of engagement expected from Governors (and the vast majority are, sadly, largely inactive in the

charity's affairs) it simply does not represent the best practice for modern charity leadership. In reality, the Court of Assistants fulfils the functions of a contemporary Board of Trustees, and appoints new Trustees based on a clear analysis of its needs, with the benefit of a professional, open and comprehensive search to fill any vacancies. Unlike Governors, who are appointed for life, Trustees have term limits, meaning that there is already an in-built check on their "power". As such, the Court remains committed – as, we know, do many Governors – to rectifying the historical situation where Governors formally elect the Trustees at an Annual Assembly.

However, it is clear from last October's Assembly, and from Ben's discussions with a number of you, that even those who are supportive of the reforms are eager to ensure that the Court of Assistants remains accountable, both to supporters (including Governors) and more widely. I have heard that message loudly and clearly, and we will respond energetically. Governors will remain a valued part of our wider family, and will have new opportunities to hold the charity's leadership to account. That will include an annual meeting with me, as Senior Treasurer, and the Chief Executive, to ask questions and scrutinize the charity's work; invitations to supporter gatherings (both existing, like the Festival and Carol Service, and new ones, too); and early receipt of key documents like Annual Reports and Strategies. When we recruit new Trustees, as happens most years due to inevitable turnover, Governors will be notified of those appointments, so that they can maintain oversight of the Court's composition (and feed back on that as they wish), and Governors will of course also be eligible to put themselves forward for those vacancies if they wish (in which case they would be considered and assessed like other candidates).

Like many charities, we are more accountable than ever to the Charity Commission and other regulators, as well as to our wider family of applicants, partners and stakeholders. Alongside existing and new ways of gathering feedback and support from Governors, including repeating our recent and well-received Governor Survey, we will continue also to improve monitoring our own performance, and encouraging others to do that – in particular, those we support. This already happens through, for example, our annual Impact Survey (attracting hundreds of responses) and new mechanisms will be in place from this autumn, including Diocesan Report Cards and a standalone Impact Report. Our new Support Hub, also launching in the autumn, will offer a wide and exciting new programme of charitable support, alongside existing grants and services, and opportunities also for applicants to suggest new initiatives.

Importantly, we believe this modernization chimes with the views and wishes of many Governors. In meetings and correspondence, a number of you have expressed a discomfort with the current arrangements, and a desire to see reform. We were delighted that many of you responded to our recent Governor Survey. By far and away the most popular response, when asked how you wish to engage with and support the Trust in future, was "attending in-person events" and, as outlined above, we envisage this increasing over the next few years.

Governors also expressed a clear desire to “share professional expertise”, “attend online events”, “become a regular donor” and “introduce potential supporters”. All of these will be major planks of our ongoing relationship with Governors, bringing – we hope – clarity, purpose and value to the Governor role, while enabling the charity to have fit-for-purpose, best-in-class governance.

I hope this letter has been helpful in laying out the Trustees’ views, but it is not, of course, the end of the road! We hope very much that you will join us on 23rd July for the Extraordinary General Meeting, and that you will vote in support of the Resolution included within the Meeting paperwork. We believe it brings the charity into line with the best contemporary practice, while ensuring that Governors continue to have a meaningful and valued relationship with the Trust, offering their skills and passion to its overall operation. If you are unable to attend, we hope you will vote “yes” by proxy (or appoint a proxy, possibly me as Chair, to vote as they deem fit on the day); information on how to do this is included.

Finally, please remember to bring your photo ID for admission to Lambeth Palace! It will be very good to see many of you there, at 2.30pm on Thursday 23rd July, for this important Assembly.

With thanks for your continued support, and all best wishes,



Richard Farmbrough
Senior Treasurer
Clergy Support Trust