

To all Licensed Clergy, Clergy with PTO, Licensed Lay Ministers, Focal Ministers, PCC Secretaries, Church Wardens, Head Teachers, MAT Leaders and Safeguarding Coordinators

The Annunciation

Date: Wednesday 25th March 2026

Our ref: MJS/jrp-bp6152

Dear friends,

“England United” - St George’s Day, flag flying, and faith in public life

We’re taking the unusual step of writing a pastoral letter – and including school leaders – during the season of Lent because St George’s Day falls so soon after Easter (23rd April). And this year, I believe St George’s Day will take on particular significance. Let us explain why.

We live in an increasingly polarised society. Social media and AI make it hard to distinguish between true and fake news. And some politicians are exploiting this to increase their own popularity and play on the divisions already present in society. And we live in an increasingly unpredictable world with war being waged in many different parts of the world, which will undoubtedly have an impact on our own society and economy.

All of this raises significant questions about the role of the church (and our schools) at such a time – and in particular, the role of the Church of England as the established church in this land. Like many others, I have been particularly alarmed by the use of Christian language and imagery to justify exclusionary and divisive agendas – whether directed against asylum seekers, people of other faiths, or other minority communities.

In the light of all this, several months ago the Archbishops asked me (Martyn) to chair a small working group looking at how the Church of England responds. We are clear that this is a long-term piece of work which will need to explore significant questions about both our role in local communities and in national debates. But we are also looking to respond to events as they arise – and hence we are inviting all churches to consider how they celebrate St George’s Day, engage in local government changes, and the men’s football World Cup in June.

St George’s Day (23rd April)

We are keen to encourage our churches and schools to celebrate this day as an opportunity to bring people together in a show of unity. If we do not, we risk the significance of the day being defined by those who have a narrow understanding of who belongs in our nation. Resources are being produced by the national church and will be made available on their website – this will include suggestions for school acts of worship and teaching materials, as well as prayers for use in churches, and ideas for local community events.

You may also have seen that we are encouraging churches to fly the St George’s flag. We recognise this is not straightforward – the flag has meant different things at different times, and some churches or schools may feel hesitant given its recent associations. Nevertheless, it is our considered view that we should not cede this symbol to those who use it divisively. By flying it with clear

explanation of our inclusive intent, we can help reclaim it as a sign of welcome for all — and that message will carry particular weight coming from the Church of England.

You may like to use the tagline “England United” as part of this. This is now being promoted by a wide range of charities seeking to overcome the divisions in society. Although inspired by our men’s football team (and the very diverse squad which is likely to represent England at the World Cup) it is not limited to that event.

Local government changes (May, June, July)

There is only one County Council by-election (Narborough & Whetstone) in May 2026, but the consultation process is currently underway for the future shape of local government across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. More details of the three options can be found here, as well as the link to submit a response: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-leicestershire-leicester-and-rutland/proposals-for-local-government-reorganisation-in-leicestershire-leicester-and-rutland>

Unfortunately, some of the debate around the new structure has already been quite heated, and the divide between our city and county has been pronounced. We expect a decision to be made by national government in the summer of this year – but whichever option is chosen, it is likely there will be some form of protest against it! I believe our churches and schools can play a key role in bridging this divide – challenging prejudice and encouraging partnership working.

Men’s Football World Cup (June)

As already mentioned, the England and Scotland men’s football teams are very diverse and the potential for the nation to get behind them is a good opportunity to reinforce the message of unity (with apologies to those from Northern Ireland and Wales who sadly didn’t qualify for the finals!) Once again, I hope that the national church will supply some resources, but I am sure you will have your own thoughts on how to do this.

Local churches and schools have a key role to play helping people engage well across differences. But this will require us to be proactive and thoughtful in our services, events and communications. Clergy will be exploring this further at our Study Day (May 14th) and I know that Carolyn Shoyer would be very happy to explore this further with school leaders.

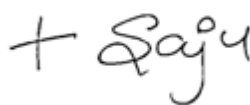
Finally, after Easter, we will be conducting an online survey (with just a very few questions) about what sort of resources would help you engage with these issues. This is a pilot for a wider survey by the national church later in the year.

This comes with our prayers for the rest of Lent, for Holy Week and Easter. May we be inspired by the service, love and resurrection of our Lord.

With continued thanks and blessings for your ministry in Christ,



The Rt Revd Martyn Snow
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