



AD CLERUM: Advent 2019

Dear Colleagues

It is good to be able to greet you before the season of conspicuous consumption overtakes us. In the frantic busyness of Christmas shopping and with the General Election looming, it is hard to direct our energy into spiritual preparation for the birth of Christ. It is also hard to work out what is true in the current political climate, which abounds with 'fake news'. It is why we need to be anchored in the reality of Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh, who is 'full of grace and truth'. When so much is in flux, we need to be rooted in the unchanging love of God.

#FollowTheStar

The Church of England is once again running a #FollowTheStar campaign this Christmas, inviting people to 'Follow the Star' into church. It is a simple way to connect with people, particularly those on the fringe of our churches. The Digital Team at Church House in London is encouraging churches to build on last year's campaign, which reached nearly eight million people on social media. The mobile-friendly website, AChurchNearYou.com will once again play a major role in this. Please take five minutes and add your Christmas services and events to this site. It receives more than ten million views each year; so it is well worth investing in. You can also order the new *#FollowTheStar: Twelve days of Christmas wonder* booklet. The Diocesan Communications and Engagement Team is producing 24 short 'Follow the Star' films featuring people from around Devon sharing their faith story. These films will be released daily throughout Advent on our Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube pages. Please share them on your church network. You are also welcome to download them to use in Advent and Christmas services. You will find more resources on both our diocesan website and on the national website by following this link: <https://www.churchofengland.org/christmas>

Clergy Quiet Days 2020

I will be hosting another series of Quiet Days for licensed clergy next year based in the Cathedral and Palace. I am heartened by the number of you who say how helpful you find them. As well as providing an opportunity for prayer and recollection, in a large Diocese like ours, these days also offer a chance to renew contact with colleagues from across Devon whom we seldom see. Please note the dates in your diary now: Thursday 27th February, Wednesday 1st March, Tuesday 24th March, Wednesday 25th March, Wednesday 1st April, Thursday 2nd April. If you want to book a place, an online system is in operation using this link <http://exeter.anglican.org/bishop-roberts-quiet-days/>. I'm sure you will understand what a complex process it is each year to identify days that work both for the Cathedral and support staff, as well as my diary. Sadly, it has proved impossible to include Saturdays, which might have been more convenient for SSM colleagues. Constraints on numbers mean that I cannot extend an invitation to retired clergy either. Can I suggest that any retired clergy holding PtO who would like to come are welcome to enquire with my office and, if space does permit, then I would be delighted to include you.

Bishops in Mission: JOY 2020

Next year Bishop Jackie, Bishop Nick and I will be spending three consecutive days in each archdeaconry on mission with you. These weekends will concentrate on 'Making New Disciples', focusing on four areas: families and children, young people aged 17-25, people aged 55 and over; and those on the fringe of our churches who hesitate to commit, but are interested enough to put their big toe in the waters of faith. The hope is that these weekends will encourage all of us to share our faith with greater confidence and enable local people to see that the church in Devon is alive and well, and that Christianity has much to offer them in today's world. The weekends are entitled JOY 2020, picking up on the third of our diocesan priorities, 'Serving the people of Devon with joy'. The weekends are not royal visits, but are intended to be a catalyst for the relationships that already exist, a means to help open doors and make connections for you to build on. Their lasting value will be the follow up you make at a local level, which is why we hope that at every event will make it clear what the next step is that people can take in exploring faith. This might be coming to a pre-existing event, following up on contacts you have made during the weekend or an enquirers' course in the weeks that follow. Please think about what you might want to do off the back of these weekends to maximize their potential.

Barnstaple	6 th – 8 th March
Exeter	20 th – 22 nd March
Totnes	1 st – 3 rd May
Plymouth	26 th – 28 th June



Local archdeaconry planning groups are already hard at work putting together amazing activities and exciting opportunities to put God back into the conversation. Please get in touch with James Grier, our Diocesan Mission Enabler, if you would be willing to get involved or know someone whom we could approach: james.grier@exeter.anglican.org

Responding to issues and concerns in the Diocese

As many of you will know, a national review of the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) is currently under way. In parallel with this, we have put in place a new process to respond to concerns that are raised about individual clergy in this Diocese. This follows our own review of the previous protocol known as the Six Step Process. It will be overseen by the relevant archdeacon and will focus on informal conversations or mediation carried out at a local level wherever possible. This new approach will be lighter touch and more flexible. No two cases are the same and each case will need a tailored response. To that end, the Diocesan Wellbeing Panel, led by Bishop Jackie, will seek to recruit and train mediators and facilitators across the Diocese over the coming year. The Clergy Handbook and information on the Diocesan website will be adapted in December to reflect these changes. Safeguarding concerns will continue to be handled by our Diocesan Safeguarding Team, and serious concerns must still be dealt with through the Clergy Discipline Measure or the Capability Process. If you have any question about this change, please contact your archdeacon who will be happy to talk to you.

Reflective Practice Groups

The Diocesan Wellbeing Panel is also keen to promote Reflective Practice Groups. Feedback from those clergy who are part of a Reflective Practice group is consistently positive. It is clear that the groups are a highly valued and effective form of ongoing ministerial development and support. Taking part in such a group has become an established part of the working lives of others in the caring professions. To explain how the groups work and how they are adapted to

the particular needs of clergy in the Diocese, we are running an introductory morning on Friday 31st January, 10am – 1pm at the Old Deanery, ending with lunch. The morning will include an opportunity to take part in a Reflective Practice group session. To book a place, please contact cathy.schoffield@exeter.anglican.org

Diocesan Clergy Conference 2021

Over 300 clergy and readers came to Belmont Chapel the other Saturday for our Diocesan Study Day entitled, ‘Growing Together in Praise and Lament’. It was a huge success and our thanks go to our two keynote speakers, Professor Sue Gillingham and David Runcorn, and the seminar leaders. The day marked the halfway point to our next residential Clergy Conference in 2021, which will be held at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester. It will run from Monday 28th June to Thursday 1st July 2021. Please note the dates in your diary now as I expect all licensed clergy to attend and take advantage of this great opportunity.

Employment Law Seminar for Parishes

In response to the ever growing complexities of employment law the People (HR) Team, in conjunction with our Diocesan Registrar, has developed a one day seminar to help people in Parishes understand their responsibilities when employing staff. One seminar will be held in each Archdeaconry in the first two weeks of March 2020 as follows:

Plymouth	Tuesday 3 rd March
Exeter	Saturday 7 th March
Totnes	Monday 9 th March
Barnstaple	Thursday 12 th March

We are finalising venue arrangements and invitations to a practical and engaging seminar on topical areas of employment law will be issued in early January. Please note the dates and watch out for further information in the New Year.

Marriage Registration Changes

A number of you have asked when the forthcoming changes to marriage registration announced earlier this year will take effect, replacing marriage registers with a new national ‘Marriage Document’ system, similar to that already in use in Scotland. The Act of Parliament, which paves the way for the new procedures, is now on the statute book, but secondary legislation and new administrative procedures are required before the new system can be launched. Although the Government had intended to bring these in before the end of the year, the dissolution of Parliament has set the process back. Although it remains a matter of when, rather than if, the changes will come into force, at present the General Register Office is unable to forecast even a rough timetable for implementation. In the meantime, existing arrangements for the registration of marriages, submitting marriage returns, and issuing marriage certificates continue unchanged. We are assured that clergy of the Church of England will be given sufficient time and training to prepare for this first major overhaul of marriage registration since 1837. Further information is available on the website of the Archbishop’s Faculty Office:

<http://www.facultyoffice.org.uk/special-licences/marriage-law-news/>

New monthly newsletter

The Diocesan Communications and Engagement Team is planning a new monthly newsletter for clergy, Readers and church officers. This will complement my Ad Clerum and the existing Roots newsletter, the latter of which is aimed more at the general public and church members. If you

would like to suggest anything for inclusion in the new newsletter, please email communications@exeter.anglican.org

General Election

'General Elections, of their very nature, are technicolour affairs; politics on steroids. They are kaleidoscopic rather than primary coloured (in contrast to the choices posed by referendums) and therefore unpredictable in terms of which issues will run and in what direction.' So remarks Peter Hennessy, Professor of Contemporary British History at Queen Mary, University of London. Many of you will remember his powerful lecture at our Clergy Conference in 2017. The way we discuss issues of local and national importance has certainly become divisive. It is tempting to think that the current bitterness is a result of the impasse over Brexit, but it may go deeper than that. There is no doubt that the internet has revolutionized communication. However, social media has also opened up a vein of nastiness where Members of Parliament and public servants are regularly humiliated and threatened. Late in the day, we are waking up to the way those who want to undermine our democracy exploit the opportunities that social media offers to set people against one another. Bullying needs to be named and challenged, language needs to be moderated, and disagreements need to be framed in a culture of mutual respect. Trust is vital in public life and it is clearly at a low ebb.

When it comes to a General Election, character is important in our politicians, and every politician is imperfect, just like us. In a democracy, we exercise a choice between imperfect people and imperfect ways forward. Which is why scrutinising the manifestos of the political parties is important. As Christians, whatever our political allegiance, we will be concerned for the disadvantaged and those on the margin. We will be passionate about the environment and the protection of the planet, and we will want to see resources distributed fairly across the country. We want to help build community and promote the common good, but we also lament the diminishing set of values and ethics that bind us together in Britain.

After the election, local churches will be well placed to help in the process of healing and reconciliation that we face as a nation. So let us pray for a vision of Britain rooted in the compassion and generosity of God. You may wish to use the official prayer of the Church of England for the General Election:

God of grace and truth,
send your Spirit to guide us
as we discern your will for our country.
Help us to discuss the issues before us
with courtesy and mutual respect,
and grant that all who stand for public office
will seek to serve the common good,
through him who came not to be served but to serve,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, perhaps the best witness we can make to 'the redemption wrought by this Holy Child' is to live in truth ourselves. When we speak honestly and live with integrity, then we reflect more assuredly the light of Christ. Bishop Nick and Bishop Jackie join me in sending you our greetings for a blessed Advent and Christmas. When the Lord comes, may he find us watching and waiting for the fulfilment of his Kingdom in love, joy and peace.

+ Robert Exon