



AD CLERUM

Michaelmas 2020

Dear Colleagues,

A warm welcome to those of you for whom this is your first *Ad clerum*, especially the newly ordained and those shortly to be licensed as readers. In spite of Government restrictions, the ordinations of sixteen new deacons in the Cathedral earlier in the month and the ordinations of priests last weekend were wonderful occasions: simple, dignified and joyous. The sense of the presence of God was palpable.

Harvest and the Season of Creation

Earlier in the year during lockdown, and most recently as a result of the wonderful Indian summer weather we have enjoyed, many of us have rediscovered the privilege of living in one of the most beautiful counties in England. In the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'. Nature is indifferent to humanity. The waves pound the seashore and Dartmoor continues to live and breathe whether or not we choose to walk on it. We human beings, however, cannot afford to be indifferent to nature.

In some parts of the worldwide Church, the month of September has become a focus of prayer and environmental action, often climaxing with a celebration of creation on 4 October, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, or the annual Harvest Festival. This new 'Season of Creation' has been adopted by many parishes and schools as part of an ecumenical initiative to raise awareness of the urgent ecological challenges facing our generation. A volume of resources has been produced by the Liturgical Commission to help with this entitled, *Time for Creation*. Some of the material is newly commissioned, including an Act of Commitment for the Care of Creation. Other material has been garnered from existing texts, which might otherwise be overlooked, such as prayers relating to the Agricultural Year. With congregational singing prohibited and strict social distancing in force, our celebration of Harvest this year will be muted, but these resources can refresh and enliven our worship. May Harvest encourage us to live generously in praise of our Creator.

Sharing the load

The majority of our church buildings in the Diocese have now reopened if only for private prayer, if not for public worship. I am conscious that many of you in your

desire to include those who are self-isolating or otherwise housebound are now holding not only live 'in person' services in your churches, but are also providing online services via Zoom or social media as well. This is incredibly hard work and a real juggle. My colleagues and I on the senior staff would like to support you and ease the burden where we can. Throughout the autumn and winter, therefore, we will be producing a series of seasonal video reflections and a short weekly video sermon/talk based on the Sunday lections. These will be made available in advance for you to download and use in your online services as and when you would like to. We hope in this way to take some of the pressure off you. I have filmed the first talk on Harvest and it will be available from 1st October via Vimeo:

<https://vimeo.com/user123875091>

Remembrance

November in the public mind is very much a season of remembrance, with many memorial services taking place on or around All Saints and All Souls. We have been fortunate in Devon in having (so far) a low rate of infections and deaths from Covid-19. It has been a different story in other parts of the country where people were unable to plan or attend funerals. As we all know, the continuing Government restriction on no more than thirty attending a funeral can be difficult to manage pastorally. Each death will have been marked with care and compassion, with thanksgiving and hope, but many will still feel that the story of their relative's life has not been adequately told. In our ministry to the bereaved this autumn, we need to create opportunities for thanksgiving and remembering in differing and imaginative ways. Where possible, it would be good to do so in partnership with the local funeral director, thereby building a good working relationship. *When we meet again: Remembering and Memorials*, offers resources and guidance for bereavement services. The material can be accessed on the Church of England's main Coronavirus page under 'Further Reading': <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

With regard to local and civic gatherings on Remembrance Sunday, be they inside a church building or outdoors at a local war memorial, national guidance has now been issued as a FAQs on the Church of England website

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

The link also highlights a number of resources that are available to mark these occasions.

Who supports the supporters?

If you are a licensed member of the clergy, you will have received a questionnaire for spouses/partners and households as we endeavour to support them in ways that are appropriate. The closing date for return is 16th October and the Well-being and Pastoral Care Advisory Panel would like to hear from as many people as possible before then. All responses will help inform how we go forward. Replies should be sent to tatiana.wilson@exeter.anglican.org

Living in Love and Faith

Living in Love and Faith is a project sponsored by the Church of England that has been two years in gestation. It is designed to help us learn together how questions about human identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage fit within the bigger picture of what it means to embody a Christian vision of living in love and faith in Britain today. The resources will be published on 9th November in both written and digital form, and be accompanied by a series of short films. The aim of this variety of formats is to make them accessible, helpful and attractive to as wide a range of people as possible. They are of an outstanding quality and should facilitate excellent conversations.

This nationwide project will be led by the bishops in each diocese as part of our responsibility for upholding and teaching the Christian faith. The publication of the resources will launch a two-year process of engagement and learning in order to discern a way forward for the Church.

With Bishop Nick and Bishop Jackie, I would like to invite all clergy and readers who hold my licence together with all deanery lay chairs to a **Day Conference on Thursday 12th November (9.30am-4pm)** to experience some of these resources. Those who are licensed will receive in mid-October a personal invitation to book your place; so please make a note of the date in your diary now. It will be held on Zoom and be facilitated by some of those who have collaborated in producing the resources including Eeva John (the LLF Enabling Officer), Jessica Martin, Andrew Goddard, Giles Goddard, Alex Clare-Young and Susannah Cornwall. You can find out more at

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/living-love-and-faith>

Unconscious bias training

Events both at home and abroad are raising our awareness of the destructive power of racial stereotyping. **Unconscious bias training** is now mandatory for every licensed clergyperson and reader in the Diocese and is being rolled out this autumn. The early sessions are already fully booked, but there are vacancies later on. If you haven't booked your place, can I encourage you to do so by following the link:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/ordained-ministry/continuing-ministerial-development-clergy/>

The training is delivered online via Zoom and will help us recognise and understand a range of bias, not only related to ethnicity but also gender, sexuality, age, (dis)ability and education. Even people's accent can influence us.

Covid-19: the second wave

It would seem that we are heading for a second wave of the coronavirus this autumn. This is the news that none of us wanted to hear. Our anxiety echoes the cry of the people of Israel in Jeremiah: 'The harvest is gathered, the summer is past, and we are not saved' (Jeremiah 8.20). Many of us were hoping that life was at last returning to normal. We were wrong. As we face a season of increasing uncertainty, we need to

bind ourselves more profoundly to Christ and renew our trust in the faithfulness of God.

This pandemic is a crisis affecting the whole world and we will not emerge from it the same. In Britain, the crisis is exposing inequities in our society with the poor and disadvantaged suffering disproportionately. The prospect of a significant increase in unemployment and homelessness seems inevitable. Mental health issues, particularly among young people, continue to be a major concern and the rise in domestic violence is threatening family life.

Next month the Government is introducing a Domestic Abuse Bill in Parliament. A change in the law has become apparent during lockdown, which tragically saw a surge in calls to domestic helplines and in reported deaths linked to domestic abuse. Meshed with the Covid-19 pandemic are profound moral and spiritual challenges. How as a nation we respond to them will determine whether we emerge from this crisis better or worse. In fashioning our nation's response, we each have a part to play.

Unsurprisingly, the Archdeacons are fielding many queries at the moment and I want to pay warm tribute to their hard work. As things evolve in our region and in response to changes in policy from the Government, the Archdeacons will endeavour to keep you posted about what is a legal requirement and what constitutes advice or best practice. You can find the latest updates at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

In the next decade, the world will be wrestling not only with the impact of the coronavirus, but with the challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability. As Christians we believe that the world is created and sustained by God, and will be made new in Christ. The world will be wrestling with questions of diversity and inclusion of race and gender, sexuality and disability. As Christians we believe that God loves all people and that the Church of Jesus Christ is called to embody the love and welcome of God. We believe that God, the maker of heaven and earth, became a human being in one time and place in order to redeem humanity in every time and place.

This is our faith and it is the ground of our hope. As we go forward together this autumn, may the Holy Spirit be our constant guide and inspiration.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon