



AD CLERUM

Advent 2020

Dear Colleagues,

First of all, a word of congratulations to Bishop Nick who has been nominated High Sheriff of Devon for the year 2023. This is a huge honour and testimony to the affection and esteem in which he is held across the county.

Secondly, a word of thanks to all who came to our recent study day. Thanks to modern technology, almost three hundred participants shared in the seminar. The Church is home to a great diversity of people and *Living in Love and Faith* seeks to hear and acknowledge as wide a range of voices and experience as possible. Matters relating to identity, sexuality, gender and marriage are deeply personal and go to the heart of people's lives and loves. The day demonstrated the quality of the resources that have been produced, including some excellent short films. I hope that over the next two years all our mission communities will engage with them and that we learn to walk together in integrity and with joy as fellow members of the Body of Christ.

Re-opening for business

As announced by the Prime Minister yesterday, places of worship can re-open for collective worship as from 3rd December when the current lockdown ceases. The Government will be imposing an enhanced 'three tier system' similar to what was in force before lockdown, although the restrictions within these tiers will be somewhat different. The government will decide which tier a region will be placed in, dependent on the analysis of a number of key indicators, and we anticipate an announcement on Thursday informing us of these decisions. We should be prepared that the tier into which Devon, Torbay and Plymouth are put may not necessarily be the same as prior to lockdown.

Funerals may be attended by up to 30 people and weddings by up to 15 people. When it comes to wakes and wedding receptions, smaller numbers and stricter restrictions will apply according to the tier an area is placed in. We wait to see the details of these new arrangements and how they will affect places of worship. Please do check on the Church of England website for updates to its guidance.

Advent and Christmas this year will certainly feel very different, but exactly how different remains to be seen. We do not know at this stage whether any form of congregational singing, including carol singing, will be permitted, whether inside or outside, and we must wait for further government guidance. Family gatherings will almost certainly be smaller. Some may not happen at all and this will be an additional burden for the bereaved and those who live alone.

Research into the current increase in mental health concerns identifies two recurrent issues: loneliness and hopelessness. In spite of the prospect of a vaccine coming on stream next year and the generous care of many, in some places neighbourliness has fractured. The restrictions on social gatherings combined with colder weather and less daylight has meant that people are not bumping into their neighbours in the street and many are feeling isolated.

Advent and Christmas

Deprived of the things that brighten up long winter nights, we all need (to quote the refrain of one of my favourite carols) some 'comfort and joy' this Christmas. With this in mind, the Church of England has produced a suite of resources aimed at supporting individuals, families and communities celebrate the birth of Christ in these challenging times. An advertising campaign will be launched this weekend on Advent Sunday.

Fifteen core reflections, written by the two Archbishops and other well-known figures, have been published by Church House Publishing (CHP) in a booklet entitled, *Comfort and Joy: Nine Lessons and Carols for Christmas*. The reflections will also be accessible on social media, apps and smart speakers. Youth reflections will be available on Instagram. You can access everything here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/preparing-advent-christmas-2020-comfort-and-joy>

A key way of connecting with your local community and ensuring that you do not lose track of 'the fringe' will be through advertising 'in person' and 'online' Advent and Christmas services and events via www.AChurchNearYou.com. Through its Resource Hub, you will also have free access to lots of high quality pre-recorded Advent and Christmas music. You can also find a host of imaginative ideas and resources for Christmas worship on the diocesan website:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/christmas-2020/>

The latest newsletter from James Grier, our Diocesan Mission Enabler, explains why and how we should still be missional this Christmas, even though it will be different from usual: <https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DME-Christmas-Newsletter-10-11-20.docx>

On Wednesday 2nd December at 4.30pm, the Archdeacons and the Reverend Professor Gina Radford will be hosting another Covid-19 Q&A Webinar to field your questions about the latest regulations.

Meanwhile our prayers are with the community of Brixham on the loss of two fishermen from the fishing vessel, the *Joanna C*, off the Sussex coast. We lift up in prayer all who are grieving at this time.

Finance Update

As a family of churches across Devon, we are committed to working together through the financial hardships of this pandemic so that each church can continue to serve the people of Devon at a time when God's message of hope is so needed. Advent is the time of year when we send to parish treasurers the Common Fund request for 2021 and it is encouraging to see how many of them have signed up for the PCC Treasurer training currently being run by our Diocesan Finance Team.

Their commitment during this pandemic has been exceptional, especially given the challenges that many are facing both personally and in juggling their PCC finances.

At last month's Diocesan Synod, it was agreed that the request per participant for 2021 would be held at the current level. Overall, the average number of participants is lower and this means that we have requested £175,000 less than in 2020. For a few parishes the request will be higher, but for the vast majority it will be lower.

I continue to be moved by the generosity of our worshipping communities. It is amazing that, as at the end of last month, total contributions to the Common Fund were only 5.75% lower than at this point last year. Whilst this is much better than our initial fears, it is still likely to translate into a £1m shortfall this year. The good news is that regular giving seems to have held up remarkably well. The Parish Giving Scheme has made a significant difference and I commend it to those parishes that have not yet signed up. Do contact Brigit Kiyaga, our Mission Resources Adviser, for more information: Brigit.kiyaga@exeter.anglican.org.

New Handbook of Clergy Terms and Conditions of Service

An enormous amount of care has gone into updating our *Clergy Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook*. Together with associated policies, this is now available to download from the diocesan website: <https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/clergy-hr/> This new edition includes a significant amount of useful signposting, plus comprehensive guidance on sustaining a healthy pattern of work.

Our Work-Life Balance (Family Friendly) Policies have been brought into line with the latest guidance from the Archbishops' Council, including increased Maternity Pay provision. You will also find a new Social Media Policy, reflecting our increased dependence on digital communications, and a Whistleblowing Policy, in keeping with best practice. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with the updated *Handbook*. The Archdeacons will be happy to field any questions you may have.

How Clergy Thrive

Earlier in the year, the General Synod formally adopted the *Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing*. This was affirmed by our own Diocesan Synod in October. The national Ministry Team has been working to support this initiative and Liz Graveling has authored a new book on clergy wellbeing, drawing on insights gleaned from the hundreds of clergy who took part in the Living Ministry survey. The booklet, *How Clergy Thrive: Insights from Living Ministry*, offers statistics from her research, recommendations and insights, as well as questions for discussion to promote clergy wellbeing. Copies may be purchased from Church House Publishing, but can also be downloaded free: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/How%20Clergy%20Thrive%20Downloadable%20for%20Local%20Non%20Commercial%20Use.pdf>

Preparing for Retirement

Accompanying others through the different stages of their lives is a rewarding part of ordained ministry. Attentiveness to our own journey is equally important, but can easily be neglected amidst the competing demands of caring for others. Approaching retirement is one such life stage. '*Preparing for Retirement*' is a new resource being launched by the Diocese for clergy (and their spouses and partners) who are within

two years/eighteen months or less of retirement. It will take the form of two consultation days, the aim of which will be:

- to help clergy and their spouses/partners prepare for a fruitful retirement
- to reflect on the social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of retirement
- to consider what it means to leave a parish/ministry post well
- for participants to go away with a plan of action for / clearer picture of the time leading up to retirement in anticipation of the early transitions life in retirement brings.

The first consultation days will be on Saturday 27th February and Saturday 13th March 2021. For details or to book places, please contact mandm@exeter.anglican.org. Further resources will be published on the diocesan website.

Families for Children: Adoption and support for families

I commend to your prayers the charity *Families for Children*, which was founded as a joint initiative by our Diocese and Plymouth Diocesan Catholic Children's Society. This independent adoption agency, based in Buckfast, works across the South-West, not only placing children from all over the UK for adoption, but also supporting adolescents who have been in the care system and now live with guardians/kinship families or who have been adopted. All the children they place have experienced developmental trauma and need additional support to help them make sense of their life stories. Some have a range of complex needs resulting from early traumatic experiences, including abuse and neglect.

As a Christian based organisation, they believe that the best place for children to grow up is within their birth family or family of origin. Where this is not possible, they ensure children find loving, safe and secure adoptive families. They ask us to pray that vulnerable children find loving homes; that more prospective adoptive parents come forward to care for these traumatised children; and that *Families for Children* receives sufficient funds to continue its work. Each year they need to raise £400,000 to fund their work and, along with many other charities, they have experienced a significant loss of income due to the pandemic. For further information, please contact Ruth Marriott, the Chief Executive: rmariott@familiesforchildren.org.uk

Faith and Government Policy

The Government has appointed a Faith Engagement Adviser, Colin Bloom, at the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to lead a review of how the Government interacts with faith groups, including the Church of England, during the Covid-19 recovery phase and beyond. It has issued a 'Call for Evidence' in the form of an online survey, which is open *until 11th December*. Can I encourage you to participate? It takes about 15 minutes to complete and is an opportunity for us to demonstrate how faith enriches and empowers our lives and relationships. <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/government-calls-individuals-respond-faith-engagement-review>

In the midst of so much change and uncertainty, one thing that does not change is the reality of God's love in Jesus Christ. As we prepare to celebrate his birth this Christmas, we remember that God is indeed with us. Emmanuel: God is with us in times of sorrow and difficulty, as well as in times of joy and celebration. In the strong words of St John from the prologue to his Gospel: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never overcome it'. In that light, we place our faith and it gives us hope.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon