



AD CLERUM

Ash Wednesday 2021

Dear Colleagues,

It is good to be able to greet you at the beginning of Lent though, if you are like me, you may feel you have been living Lent for some time. Believe it or not, 23rd March will mark the anniversary of the first national lockdown. For many people it will be a significant anniversary. These two prayers may speak to them:

Lord Jesus Christ,
when fear and anxiety besiege us
and hope is veiled in grief,
hold us in your wounded hands
and make your face shine on us again,
for you are our Lord and God.

Gracious God,
as we remember before you
the thousands who have died,
surround us and all who mourn
with your strong compassion.
Be gentle with us in our grief,
protect us from despair,
and give us grace to persevere
and face the future with hope
in Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

Re-opening for business?

I do not know when schools, shops and businesses will be allowed to re-open and we emerge into the sunlight from this latest lockdown. Much will depend on the success of the vaccine rollout and the level of occupancy of critical care beds in our hospitals. We wait to see what the Prime Minister will announce on the 22nd February, but the Government is understandably coy about whether or not restrictions will be lifted in time for Easter. This means that I do not yet know whether the annual **Chrism Eucharist**, with the Blessing of Oils and Renewal of Ministerial Promises, can happen in person in the Cathedral or not. As things stand, it is more likely that we will need to livestream the service. Either way, please keep the morning of Thursday 1st April free in your diary. I will write again, when things are clearer.

The majority of church buildings in our Diocese are open, if not for public worship, then for personal prayer. Thank you for all you and your churchwardens are doing to ensure they remain Covid-safe. A number of you have applied for a dispensation where none of the church buildings in your benefice is able to offer communal worship on Sundays safely. Those dispensations expire at the end of this month. In the absence of any direction from the Government, I have resolved to extend those dispensations until 31st March. This will give you and your churchwardens time to review your local situation and plan how best to observe Holy Week and Easter.

Lent Reflections: Travelling Home

One of the frustrations of the lockdown is that I am not in a position to welcome you to the Palace and Cathedral for Quiet Days this Lent. Instead, as many of you already know, I will be hosting a series of reflections on the Book of Exodus via Zoom. Entitled 'Travelling Home', the talks are open to clergy and readers on a first come, first served basis. They will be recorded and available online to everyone after each session. I hope that you will be able to join me for the whole sequence of talks, but if this is not possible, please book in for as many as you can attend. Each session will start at 9.45am and finish at approximately 11am, as follows:

The Great Escape	24 th February
The Red Sea	3 rd March
Travelling the Wilderness Road	10 th March
The Holy Mountain	17 th March
Crossing the Jordan	24 th March

Please email Claire in my office to book a place: claire.sherlock@exeter.anglican.org

These Are Our Stories: Lent in a Pandemic Year

This specially-designed five week Lent course is based on the stories of five Devon people to help each of us tell our own stories and to reflect on where our faith fits into the experience of the past twelve months. The course has been designed by Jon Curtis, our Diocesan Lay Discipleship Adviser and is based on the work of the Covid-19 theological reflections group of clergy and lay people from across the Diocese. You will find all the information, course notes and videos here:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/lent-course-2021/>

Social Media Guidelines

Social media is a very public way of enabling us as Christians to live out our calling to share the good news of Jesus Christ. One of its many joys is that it is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This opportunity comes with a number of downsides if users do not apply the same common sense, kindness and sound judgement that we would use in a face-to-face encounter. Our conversations need to reflect our Christian values.

For example, many clergy use Twitter. Given that many use their profile picture with their tweets, clearly identifying them as clergy, it is imperative that their behaviour

mirrors the very best online behaviour. In support of this aspiration, the Church of England has created a social media charter to help us all love our neighbour online:

Be safe. The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, contact a member of our Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

Be respectful. Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful.

Be kind. Treat others how you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just whether you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.

Be honest. Do not mislead people about who you are.

Take responsibility. You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. If you are not sure, don't post it.

Be a good ambassador. Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.

Disagree well. Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it is important we apply our values in the way we express them.

Credit others. Acknowledge the work of others. Respect copyright and always credit where it is due. Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.

Follow the rules. Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.

Archbishops' Commission on Housing

The report of the Housing, Church and Community Commission will be published on Sunday 21st February. Launched in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the goal of the Commission is to re-imagine housing in our nation and to ask, first, what the church can do to alleviate the crisis and then to ask what others might do. Poor housing affects all communities to a greater or lesser extent, both urban and rural. The resources the Commission has created can be found on the national website:

archbishopofcanterbury.org/cominghome/churchresources

They include Bible studies, case studies and guides for churches, plus an excellent animated three minute video that sets out the five core values for 'good' housing.

Living in Love and Faith

The project was launched in November 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 are in both written and digital form, and are accompanied by a series of short films. It would be great if individual churches, mission communities or deaneries could run the LLF course at some point this year and contribute to the wider conversation about the way forward for the Church of England. As a senior staff team, my colleagues and I have set aside a series of weekday evenings after Easter to do the course ourselves, and we look forward to engaging with the material personally in this way. In order for every voice to be heard, we need to gather meaningful feedback from those who have done the course. Please let us know if and when you are running the course by completing the form on the diocesan website so that we can send you a feedback questionnaire to share with participants: <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/living-in-love-and-faith/>

Sacred space

‘Take off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground’ (Exodus 3.5). New challenges and opportunities continue to emerge during this pandemic, including new ways of being church. We do not know whether all our churches will be able to re-open for Easter, but for many people not to be able to enter their church and worship ‘in person’ has been a real deprivation. For them, returning to church this Easter will feel like a homecoming, a long-awaited return from exile with an opportunity to celebrate the presence of the risen Christ in our midst. For some, feelings of grief and loss will be dominant as they walk up the church path. Few families and congregations have been unaffected by illness and death. All this came home to me with some force reading a notice displayed in one of our churches:

Homecoming

We love these places for the memories they hold, for the lives that have passed through them. They are ‘thin places’ of polished wood, stained glass, and the smell of prayer books and dust. When we allow them to be, they are icons, porous to the holy, and when we are away from them, we often long for them. It is like longing for home. In 2020, we were away from them for a long time. And though that didn’t prevent our serving and celebrating in new and vibrant ways, many of us felt something like the longing of the Babylonian exile, when the focus changed from temple to text, from ritual to word. As it turns out, that exile was a time of transformation. And there was, in the end, a homecoming.

Bishop Nick, Bishop Jackie and my colleagues on the senior staff join me in assuring you of our prayers as we enter this season of Lent. May the God of compassion travel with us and bring us all safely home.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon