



AD CLERUM

6 September 2022

Dear Colleagues,

There is always a rush of adrenalin in September, combined with a sense of relief to be back in some sort of routine after the summer holidays. And what an extraordinary summer it has been with the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, wall-to-wall sunshine and record temperatures. The summer has been significant for young people, parents and teaching staff too. Last month saw the publication of the first set of exam results for three years. And, of course, yesterday has seen the announcement of the result of a different competition with the election of Liz Truss as Leader of the Conservative Party and today her appointment as Prime Minister. We pray for her as she appoints her cabinet and addresses the challenge of the hike in the price of fuel and the cost of living crisis.

Lambeth Conference 2022

The high point for me this summer was attending the 15th Lambeth Conference in Canterbury. Sharing in worship, study and discussion with over 1,400 bishops and spouses from across the world was an unforgettable experience. Praying the 'Our Father' in our mother tongue generated a holy cacophony of prayer, a daily experience of Pentecost. The theme of the conference was 'God's Church for God's World' and it felt as if the world was indeed there with simultaneous translations into Portuguese, French, Juba-Arabic, Burmese, Korean, Spanish, Japanese and Swahili. There is always much to fragment and divide humanity, which is why the conference's Biblical focus on the First Letter of Peter was so helpful. Peter's letter explores the themes of suffering, despair, joy, exile and alienation. We endeavoured to identify and name the 'roaring lions' that stalk the darkness (1 Peter 6.8) and frighten the flock, but above all to rejoice in the call of Jesus Christ who will 'restore, support, strengthen and establish us.'

Lambeth Calls

'Lambeth Calls' was the title given to the series of declarations and invitations by the bishops outlining ways in which the Anglican Communion might collectively seek to be 'God's Church for God's World' in the decade ahead. The themes encompassed Mission and Evangelism, Safe Church, Anglican Identity, Reconciliation, Human Dignity, the Environment and Sustainable Development, Christian Unity, Inter-Faith Relations, Discipleship, and Science and Faith. In spite of the fact that it was only one of ten subjects discussed in a conference lasting two weeks, it was the Call on Human Dignity that stole the headlines.

As well as the subject of human sexuality, the Call on Human Dignity addressed poverty, inequality, racism, colonialism, slavery and conflict. As we prepared to discuss these issues, Archbishop Justin issued a letter to the Anglican Communion <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/letter-archbishop-canterbury-bishops-anglican-union> and then addressed the Conference: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/lambeth-call-human-dignity-read-archbishop-justins-remarks>. He spoke with candour and realism about the different social and cultural contexts in which the Church operates that is reflected in the text of the Call: ‘Many Provinces continue to affirm that same gender marriage is not permissible... Other Provinces have blessed and welcomed same sex union/marriage, after careful theological reflection and a process of reception’ (Call.2.3). He underlined the reality of these two situations and emphasised that both attend carefully to Scripture and do not reject Christ. He said:

‘For the large majority of the Anglican Communion, the traditional understanding of marriage is something that is understood, accepted and held without question, not only by Bishops but their entire Church and the societies in which they live. For them, to question this teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries would make the Church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For many churches to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

‘For a minority, we can say almost the same. They have not arrived lightly at their idea that traditional teaching needs to change. They are not careless about scripture. They do not reject Christ. But they have come to a different view on sexuality after long prayer, deep study and reflection on understandings of human nature. For them, to question this different teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries is making the Church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For these churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

‘So let us not treat each other lightly or carelessly. We are deeply divided. That will not end soon. We are called by Christ himself both to truth and unity.’

I have quoted the Archbishop’s speech in full because I think his words are worthy of reflection as we continue to listen and discern together on the LLF journey.

The Communion Forest

The Communion Forest was launched at the conference with a symbolic tree planting by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the grounds of Lambeth Palace. The Forest will be the legacy of the conference, a practical and symbolic response to climate change and the environmental crisis. It is designed to be a *global* initiative comprising *local* activities of forest protection, tree growing and eco-system restoration that over the next ten years will be undertaken by provinces, dioceses and individual churches across the Anglican Communion, grounding our faith in the stewardship of the earth.

This initiative ties in with our own commitment as a diocese to address climate change. Our Environment Working Group is hard at work discussing the practicalities of reducing our carbon footprint and constructing a Net Zero plan. It would be a wonderful witness if we could sign up to be an Eco-Diocese. This autumn Lydia Perris is running a Carbon Literacy Course. It’s free; so please encourage people to sign up for it: <https://exeter.anglican.org/environment/carbon-literacy/>.

Season of Creation

In September our worship and preaching often focus on creation. It presents a great opportunity to integrate our environmental concerns with prayer. Thanks to modern technology, we are adept at zooming into meetings. Creationtide invites us to go into reverse gear: to step back in wonder and contemplation of the universe and the God who made us. In the words of Psalm 8: 'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have ordained, what are mortals that you should be mindful of us; mere human beings that you should seek us out?'

Ordinations

This month it will be a privilege to ordain new ministers to serve the people of Devon with joy. Fifteen new deacons will be ordained in the Cathedral on Saturday 10 September, followed later this month by a series of ordinations of thirteen priests in parishes across the Diocese.

Consecration and Installation of the new Bishop of Plymouth

Please also hold in prayer James Grier as he receives episcopal ordination in Westminster Abbey at **11am** on Thursday 29th September, the Feast of St Michael and All Angels. All are welcome to this service, but you will need to register in advance with the Abbey for an electronic ticket. Those of you who subscribe to 'Roots and Shoots' will already have received information about how to do this. If not, you can do so using this link <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/a-service-of-consecration-of-the-bishop-of-plymouth-friends-tickets-386904059457>. The closing date for ticket requests is 22nd September 2022. Bishop James will be welcomed and installed in Exeter Cathedral during Choral Evensong on Sunday 9th October at **3pm**, at which he will preach. All are welcome and no tickets are required.

Clergy Retirement Housing

The Pension Board is experiencing unprecedented demand for help with clergy housing. The CHARM scheme is available to clergy with at least 15 years of stipendiary service, offering the opportunity to rent a modest home in England and Wales at a subsidised rate. Around 1 in 6 of retiring clergy need help from the scheme. For clergy retiring with more financial assets, there are market alternatives including older persons' shared ownership and mortgage products. The Board is currently putting in place a new partnership with Ecclesiastical Financial Advisory Services which will enable clergy to get access to discounted financial advice including mortgage brokering.

If you are considering retiring in the next two to three years and think you might need the help of CHARM, please get in touch with the Board as soon as possible.

Retirement moves take at least two years to plan well and the longest lead times tend to apply in cases where substantial adaptation is required to support applicants with medical needs or where personal circumstances mean an applicant can only consider homes within a very localised area.

Next Steps and an uncertain autumn

We face many uncertainties this September, not least in relation to the cost-of-living crisis. Over eighty clergy and lay ministers in our Diocese have applied for Support Grants and to date over £16,000 has been awarded which indicates how many individuals and households are struggling. Meanwhile our churches are facing a massive increase in energy costs. Unlike domestic customers, who enjoy a cap on

energy prices, churches are business-rated premises and do not.

These are just some of the challenges to be negotiated this autumn, both as a nation and as a diocese, but there are opportunities to be grasped as well. We will be continuing to take forward the Diocesan Next Steps to stimulate imaginative but realistic conversations about how our Mission Communities can develop. Information will be coming out about our new Health Check resource, and we will be offering training and other resources to strengthen our Mission Communities and build resilience.

The prophet Ezekiel describes himself as a sentinel, posted on the ramparts to observe the terrain better in a time of warfare and anxiety. The image resonated strongly with Pope Gregory the Great. Writing in the sixth century, he said that whoever is appointed to leadership in the Church should live on the heights so that they can 'help their people by having a broad perspective'. But then, reflecting on his own ministry, he said, 'What kind of a watchman am I? I do not stand on the pinnacle of achievement. I often find myself languishing in the pit of human frailty. And yet, unworthy though I am, the creator and redeemer of us all has given me grace to see life whole and an ability to speak effectively of it. It is for the love of God that I do not spare myself in preaching Christ.'

This autumn may our eyes be open anew to God's world that we too learn 'to see life whole'. And may God give us grace to speak effectively of the transformative power of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon