



AD CLERUM

17 October 2022

Dear Colleagues,

We face many uncertainties this winter and how we cope with them will test our resilience. St Paul bids us walk by faith, but that does not mean we are immune from anxiety, not least in relation to the sharp rise in the cost-of-living. Inflation is running at just under 10%, there is an energy crisis, the threat of growing industrial unrest, and a probable rise in Covid cases.

The economic issues we face as churches, communities and individual households are complex. They present us with challenges, but also potentially with valuable missional and pastoral opportunities. Louisa May Alcott, the American novelist and author of *Little Women*, wrote 'I am not afraid of the storms because I am learning how to sail my ship'. As a diocesan team, we want to help you sail your ship this winter by providing you with the best guidance and support we can that enables you to take informed and sensible local decisions.

Energy Support and Advice

I have asked the Archdeacons to host an Energy Support and Advice webinar for clergy and church officers on **Wednesday 19 October from 4.30pm to 5.30pm**. This will be an opportunity for you to hear about support available and to ask questions. Here is the Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88509293233?pwd=Y1JLTDUvcj8xSkgreGtIWU1MRDRPZz09&from=addon>

Meeting: 885 0929 3233 Passcode: 191022

There is a crisis in energy supply, but there is also a crisis in energy efficiency. As a nation and as a Church, we are committed to addressing the causes of climate change, including reducing our carbon footprint and working towards Net Zero. The uncomfortable truth is that as a society we need to reduce our energy consumption not simply this winter but permanently. We need to invest in green technology and better home insulation. To that end, there will be a specific Clergy Housing webinar about reducing energy costs on **Thursday 20 October from 1100am to 12 pm**, hosted by Graham Davies, the Director of Property, and Sophie Phillips, our Net Zero Carbon Officer. You can book a place here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/ordained-ministry/continuing-ministerial-development-clergy/>

We have created a new **Energy Advice and Support Hub** on the Diocese of Exeter website: <https://exeter.anglican.org/environment/energy-advice-and-support-hub/>

This includes pages with guidance for churches, clergy and others in Diocesan housing, householders and schools. It will be updated regularly so please do use it.

The Church of England Environment Team is also running some excellent free webinars about reducing energy bills. You can see what is running here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/webinars-getting-net-zero-carbon>

Financial Assistance

The Church Commissioners, Archbishops' Council and Dioceses have been working together to find a way of releasing funds to support parishes with their energy costs over the winter. You will have seen a press release from the Church of England issued on 12th October announcing a new £15 million fund to help churches with their energy bills: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/new-ps15-million-fund-help-churches-energy-bills-announced>

We are now working as fast as possible to see how we can distribute the funds allocated to our Diocese to our parishes in a fair and consistent manner. The funds will not cover total energy costs over the winter, but we hope that they will provide help where it is most needed. The archdeacons will be sharing more information about this during their webinar.

Hardship Fund

In our diocese, over eighty-nine clergy and lay ministers have applied for Support Grants and to date over £35,000 has been awarded which indicates how many individuals and households are struggling. We will be opening a second round of support grants shortly and will be announced through *Roots and Shoots*. The grants available for distribution will depend on the number of applications to the fund. Taken together, our ministry hardship fund and our energy costs grants represent a financial support package of £543,000. This support is significant. It will not solve all our problems but we hope and pray that it will make a material difference to many. We will be monitoring the situation nationally as we move into winter.

Community Engagement

During the pandemic, churches rose to the challenge, cementing the Church's role as servants of their communities. Now, as the weather turns colder, how can we work with our ecumenical partners, local councils and other organisations in our communities to ensure that the church remains at the heart of a network of support for those experiencing social isolation, fuel and energy poverty?

The Church of England is a partner in the new Warm Welcome website, where you can register your church to be a local warm hub: <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/>. Some churches are already offering 'warm spaces' at certain times of the week. *Transforming Plymouth Together* has been doing a lot of work around this and can be contacted for advice: Ayshea Cross ayshea@transformingplymouthtogether.org.uk

It may also be worth stepping back to see what is already happening in your community before deciding whether your church or hall should be a warm hub. Local Authorities are opening community hubs based around libraries and other public buildings. In some places, the best course of action might be to lend support to those initiatives.

Public worship during the winter

We want to extend a warm welcome to everyone this winter. The next few months are an important time in the Church's Year: All Souls, Remembrance Sunday, Christingles, Advent, and Christmas are all important missional opportunities and, as

we make our plans, we should not lose sight of the significance of our churches as venues for these services. I mention this because I am aware that the archdeacons have received enquiries from some clergy about whether they can hold worship in places other than the church building over the winter period to keep people warm and to manage parish energy costs.

The range and diversity in terms of location and heating provision in our churches makes a 'one size fits all' approach to this impossible. A village church which has never had adequate heating and where the congregation is used to attending services wrapped up well, will not be the same as an urban church which may be open seven days a week, hosting a range of community events and services, and acting as a community hub. In the former, 'heat the person' rather than the building could be a solution whereas in the latter this is impossible.

Local clergy know their local context and will be in the best position to make decisions locally. In so doing, however, it is important to know the legal parameters in which informed decisions can be made in partnership with PCCs. Public worship on Sundays is governed by Canons B11, B14, and B14A: see <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/section-b>

The requirements are the same everywhere, but their effect will differ according to whether your mission community is a single parish or a multi-parish benefice. The law was updated three years ago to reflect realities on the ground. The basic position is that in every legal *benefice*, three services should normally be provided each Sunday: Morning Prayer, Holy Communion and Evening Prayer. Holy Communion must be celebrated somewhere in the benefice every week. *Common Worship* enables worship to take a variety of forms beyond the old mattins and evensong, and many churches already make imaginative use of this freedom to cater for a wide range of preferences with, for example, Services of the Word, family services, Taizé services and Café Church.

In a multi-parish benefice (or in a group of benefices held in plurality), it is up to the incumbent and PCCs to decide where the three statutory services will take place each Sunday and on a given Sunday the number of services across a typical multi-parish mission community may well exceed the legal minimum. Occasionally, local needs call for the pattern to be varied. For example, a priest might be on holiday with no one else available to cover. If necessary, *for a one-off occasion* the incumbent and PCC(s) can decide that there will be no service of Holy Communion in the benefice on a particular Sunday. However, any *regular* departure from the minimum must be authorised by the diocesan bishop. Now that the requirements have been made less onerous, I would hope that such authorisation needs seldom to be sought or given.

This winter will be a particular challenge. I hope that the package of support that I have outlined above will see us through, but it may be that if the weather is severe, you and your PCC(s) may decide that Holy Communion and other services need to be celebrated elsewhere than in church, perhaps in a parish hall or a local school which can be kept warmer. If yours is a single-parish benefice and the PCC has decided that worship needs to be moved out of the church building for an extended period, then you should contact my office to request the necessary permission, explaining the circumstances which have made this necessary. We will be able to turn round such requests quickly.

For a multi-parish benefice, the incumbent and PCC will need to seek my approval for relocation of worship to halls, schools, etc. only where the number of services in church on any particular Sunday would fall regularly below the statutory minimum. In

some multi-parish mission communities, I hope that it will be possible to locate acts of worship in such a way that some continue to take place in church buildings which can be kept sufficiently warm and, to that end, I encourage parishes to work together to come up with a sensible pattern.

Please note that under Canon B40, the bishop's permission is required for the celebration of Holy Communion elsewhere than in a consecrated church or a building specially licensed for the purpose (except at home for the sick or housebound). If this winter the plans for your mission community involve moving any services of Holy Communion to a hall, school, or other building for a time, then please do ask and explain briefly what is envisaged. If you are planning to use a hall or school that is not owned by us, then please also consider how their energy costs are funded and what effect your use of their premises may have on their budget.

Weddings need to be conducted in church. The Parochial Fee Order allows parishes to make a charge for the cost of heating for both weddings and funerals and parishes will need to carry out a realistic assessment of these heating costs and advise both local funeral directors and families of these potential costs. This will need to be done with huge pastoral sensitivity and it is worth considering whether your PCC could waive the heating costs for couples who can only afford a low-budget wedding.

Communicating well

If you decide to move some services to another location or online, please make sure that you communicate the changes in a positive way, in good time and as widely as possible (i.e. beyond your regular attenders). It is important that local people don't just see a closed church and wonder where everyone has gone. As far as is possible, please ensure that the church building remains open for prayer with welcoming signage.

This winter will be challenging, but as we discovered during the pandemic, it will throw up unexpected opportunities to be creative and missional, with perhaps an outdoor service around a firepit, or in a barn, or meeting in a local pub or café or the library.

In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul bids us to 'Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal.6.2). This winter will present us with many opportunities to do just that. We pray for grace to make wise and prudent decisions as together we seek to serve the people of Devon with joy.

With my thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

+ Robert Exon