



Advent Ad Clerum 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As the new church year begins and Advent is underway, I write in thankfulness for our shared ministry, holding the light of Christ, being bearers of hope as we await his coming.

Come and Pray: Thank you to all who came to pray in the Cathedral on Saturday for our Diocesan Day of Prayer. A huge thanks to Revd Sarah Mounoury and her fantastic team, who organised the day with creativity and prayer; to Andy Flannagan and the musicians, and the Exe Valley Community choir; the cathedral for hosting the event, and to everyone who joined in in Exeter, from home or in your own community. Over 4000 people came into the cathedral and caught the atmosphere of prayer, joining in at the prayer stations and being offered prayer ministry. Our verse for the day was Phil 4: 6 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.' Amidst all the many needs in our world and our local communities, may I ask also for your continued prayers for our Diocese. Prayer resources can be found here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Prayer-Guide-for-Come-and-Pray.pdf>

Come and See: The mission weekend with the Archbishop of Canterbury, from 10-12 November, was a very special time, with many people hearing the gospel and sharing the message of God's love and hope in Christ. To follow up, there are resources for mission and evangelism, including the 'Come and See' course, written and produced by the Revd Jeremy Putnam, Diocesan Mission Enabler, which I commend to you as a Lent Course for 2024; it could be used in small groups, as part of a quiet day or in worship. More details can be found here:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/christian-faith/comeandsee/come-and-see-23-resources/>

Living in Love and Faith: It was good to see many of you at the two zoom meetings held after the November General Synod. There is a dedicated web page on the diocesan website that aims to keep everyone up to date about the Prayers of Love and Faith. There is also accompanying pastoral guidance, which is in a question-and-answer format:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/living-in-love-and-faith/>

Advent waiting: We have an Advent candle on our kitchen table which we light at mealtimes. This year I bought a thicker one that takes longer to burn, because last year we left the candle alight for too long and lost three days. Advent can seem like this – it is a busy time for ministers, when both our ministry context and home life are demanding and can race along as we tick off the events, carol services, Christingles, visits, along with the shopping, cards, decorating the home. I have a fridge magnet given to me by Bishop Rachel Treweek that says, 'I try to take one day at a time but sometimes three days attack me at once.' Advent is a time of preparation, it is going to be full, and there is much joy in it. Advent is also a time of waiting, and I encourage you, to take

time each day to still your hearts with God. May the lighting of the candles and the opening of the calendars remind us that our times are in God's hands, that each day is a precious gift, and that perhaps not everything that we think needs to be done has to be done. At least not today.

Wellbeing: I will be taking a break after Christmas and hope you will too. The Diocesan offices will be closed from Christmas until 2nd January 2024. The Diocesan staff and office holders work very hard to serve the mission of the diocese and I want to record my appreciation here not just for what they do, but the spirit in which it is done. There will be emergency contacts issued nearer the time for safeguarding, housing crises and communications, and for the bishop's staff team. The number for the property team during the season is 01392 294954. Thank you to all of you for your dedication and hard work, please do ensure you have a good break after Christmas and look after your own wellbeing. I encourage you to take a look again our wellbeing resources and especially the excellent booklet [Living Well in Ministry](#). The counselling service CMCS continues to support us in our lives and ministries, do please contact them if you need someone to talk to confidentially <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/wellbeing/wellbeing-for-clergy-and-staff/>. There is support available for clergy, clergy families and other ministers, especially those facing financial difficulty during the continued cost of living crisis. If you would value some advice or support please contact your Archdeacon, who would be happy to talk, or the bishop's office, sarah.ball@exeter.anglican.org

Looking ahead: I have been given the task of leading and stewarding the Diocese through this year, until a new Diocesan Bishop arrives. In my presidential address at the Diocesan Synod in October I used the image of being on board a ship – a large sailing ship, like a schooner, or a clipper, with tall masts and billowing sails. I said, 'It is the kind of ship that needs all hands on deck, where everyone has a role. This year will require us to work together across the whole diocese, with our remarkable combined gifts, and our care of each other.' This continues to be true – both locally and as a diocese - we need, more than ever, to work together and support one another.

Looking ahead to Lent, which falls early in 2024, I want to let you know that the Bishop's Lent Quiet days will not be happening this year. I know how much they have been appreciated and will be missed. We feel this is a good time to pause some of our annual events, knowing our new Diocesan Bishop may want to introduce new opportunities for reflection and refreshment once they are in post. Perhaps in your forward planning for Lent you might instead book in your own quiet day or plan something as a local team or chapter?

Finally, Advent is a time of expectation and hope. Jesus is the hope-giver. When we see and know so much darkness and despair in the world, it can be hard to remain hopeful. The hope that Jesus gives is not a sunny optimism that 'everything happens for a reason'. The hope that Christ gives us is that God's love and light reaches to every corner of this world and of our lives. 'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of the darkness" who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' (2 Cor 4:6) May every candle lit this season be a reminder of the light of Christ, in this world, in our communities and churches, and in our hearts.

With every blessing,

+Jackie