



February 2024

Lent Ad Clerum

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I write as we enter the season of Lent to thank you for your ministry and your faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Lent is a time of penitence, of turning to Christ and choosing once again to follow him. We go into the desert, to find time and space with God, and to face all that would distract us from his love. Pope Francis describes Lent as a season of grace, a time of conversion. Conversion is not solely a one-off event, but a lifetime of choices, of repentance and turning. In this season, may our conversion to Christ be renewed, may we open ourselves to his revelation and to his message of freedom. *'For freedom Christ has set us free ... do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.'* Gal 5:1

Maundy Thursday Eucharist: In the Diocesan Eucharist at Exeter Cathedral on Maundy Thursday, 28 March at 10.30am, there is an opportunity to renew our LLM and clergy promises, made at our licensing or ordination. Let this be a service where our commitment to follow Christ is renewed. It is both personal and corporate, we turn to Christ together. Aware of all that could divide at this time, please make this a place of humbly seeking God in community, and of our visible commitment to one another. Do please invite your congregations or chaplaincies to come to that service – all are welcome. There will be a letter with details to follow shortly.

30th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: On 12th March 1994 women were ordained as priests in the Church of England, for the first time, in Bristol Cathedral. Many joyful services followed – my own 30th anniversary is 16th April when I was ordained in St Paul's Cathedral with the women clergy of London. The Diocese of Exeter followed later, at Petertide. Many of you will remember the wonderful service held at Exeter Cathedral to celebrate the 25th anniversary in 2019. To mark this milestone of 30 years the Revd Preb Samantha Stayte, Dean for Women in Ministry, and I, will be inviting ordained women (priests and deacons) to a gathering in the Bishop's Palace Garden on Wednesday 10th July from 6pm. There will be a celebratory supper with time to hear testimony, share stories, and mark the anniversary together. Whilst this will be an invitation only event, the Maundy service is a time to show support and appreciation for all clergy and LLMs, and as it falls in March and I will be presiding, this is also a time to give thanks and remember the historic change of 30 years ago.

Vacancy in See: In my last Ad Clerum I wrote of the journey we are undertaking through this time of Vacancy in See. Those involved in this stage of seeking and discerning the next Bishop of Exeter, have reached the long listing stage, and will be shortlisting at the end of this month. Do please pray for them, and for those whose names have been put forward. The interviews will be held in April, but we do not expect an announcement until the Summer.

St Boniface Awards 2024: I am delighted to launch the St Boniface Awards for this year. These are now in their fifth year and are a wonderful way of honouring the dedication, hard work and creativity of lay people in our church communities and church schools. Please consider nominating someone in your parishes, schools or chaplaincies. The nomination form is here:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/who-we-are/company-of-st-boniface/st-boniface-awards-2024/>

I previously highlighted two particular challenges in this year: Finance and the outworking of Living in Love and Faith (LLF).

Diocesan Finance: I want to thank whole-heartedly those who responded to the letter sent in December outlining the financial situation post-covid, and especially to those parishes who gave 'over and above' their common fund request. It wasn't many congregations who did this, but you know who you are, and I thank you for your generosity. The Bishop's staff, the Board of Finance and the senior management team are giving serious strategic thought as to how we reduce the deficit, whilst planning and praying for growth. Again, I ask for your prayers and support.

Living in Love and Faith update: The Prayers of Love and Faith were commended in December and are available to use within existing services or pastorally. The decision about whether to use the prayers rests with individual members of clergy and LLMs, within their own contexts, and after discussion with the ministry team and PCCs. There will be further time given to questions and discussion at the General Synod which meets from 23rd February. You can read the agenda here <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/groups-sessions-information/general-synod-february-2024#na> You may also find our FAQs document and LLF Conversations guide helpful. Both can be found here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/living-in-love-and-faith/> The focus at the General Synod will be on finding a way forward that implements the decisions previously made at Synod, listens carefully to all points of view, and that holds as many people as possible together. Those who follow these things closely, or are deeply personally involved, will know this is difficult and costly. Perhaps this Lent we might cease our seemingly endless circling in the wilderness and find a new path together.

Dates for your Diary:

Sunday 28 April: Eco-Church Celebration at Exeter Cathedral. Book tickets for this free event here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ecochurch-celebration-tickets-789190007557>

Sunday 19 May: Thy Kingdom Come Beacon Service at Exeter Cathedral at 6pm. Bring a group from your community to worship and pray together. More information about Thy Kingdom Come can be found here: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

Saturday 23 November: Please save the date as a Clergy and LLM study day.

It continues to be my privilege to lead and steward the Diocese through this season. I am so grateful to Bishop James, the Bishop's staff team, and Diocesan staff who are making this possible, and to all of you for your loving support and prayers. May we together know the presence of Christ as we enter this season of Lent, and may we find once again that his grace and love are everything we need.

With every blessing,

Bishop Jackie