



Ad Clerum

14 February 2024

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 John 4:16

Dear brothers and sisters,

Please forgive an Ad Clerum on a Friday, and indeed on Valentine's Day – having said which this does come with love in Christ(!) However, with General Synod concluding today I wanted to communicate some matters as soon as possible.

General Synod Safeguarding Update

This week has been my first ever General Synod, a required duty for diocesan bishops. It has been a packed week and good to be with Exeter's representatives through the ups and downs. I must in particular thank the Archdeacon of Totnes, the Ven. Douglas Dettmer, whose chairing through a number of tricky items was exemplary.

On Tuesday I was present for the discussion and vote about the move towards greater safeguarding independence and scrutiny. I just wanted to share some thoughts here about the outcome. As Bishop of Exeter, I am committed to the highest standards of safeguarding and enabling the voices and experiences of abuse survivors to help shape our safeguarding culture. I welcome the General Synod's decision to transfer the National Safeguarding Team to an independent body (Model 3) and thus move to independent scrutiny, together with the amendment to call for further work as to the legal and practical requirements necessary to implement Model 4.

I am aware that there will be those who are deeply disappointed with the outcome, especially many survivors of abuse. Continuing to listen to the experience of survivors and keeping survivors at the centre of our thinking as we develop safeguarding must remain absolutely essential. While we are not at model 4 I do believe there are key benefits of Model 3, including enabling the safeguarding team to remain embedded in the Diocese of

Exeter, where the team feel they can best support parishes and influence diocesan culture. Work is already underway for the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, Costa Nassaris, to transition to becoming the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, which will strengthen his autonomy in making safeguarding decisions. We have also recently recruited an Assistant Safeguarding Advisor to increase capacity in our safeguarding team, which was one of the recommendations of our recent INEQE independent safeguarding audit.

There is however no room for complacency and as a diocese, we will continue to work tirelessly to strengthen our safeguarding structures and ensure the highest standards of protection for children and vulnerable adults in our communities. We look forward to hearing more details about the implementation and delivery of the new independent body for safeguarding scrutiny.

As we navigate these changes, my colleagues and I remain committed to offering full support to our Safeguarding Team, recognising the challenges ahead. We will continue to communicate promptly and clearly with all relevant parties about any changes that may affect safeguarding practice. You can read my full statement here:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/bishops-statement-on-general-synod-safeguarding-changes/>

Ash Wednesday Day of Prayer and Fasting

Wednesday 5 March

This has been a turbulent few months for the Church of England and there is much for us to reflect on and bring before God in prayer and humility. As Bishop of Plymouth, Bishop James has felt called to undertake a day of prayer and fasting across Totnes and Plymouth Archdeaconries, where he will be leading half an hour of prayer at churches in each deanery. While we may not all be able to attend, I encourage you, wherever you are in the diocese, to set aside some time for personal prayer on Ash Wednesday if you can. (I too will be fasting as I continue to undertake 1-1 visits with clergy that day).

Covid-19 National Day of Reflection

Sunday 9 March

It's hard to believe it is nearly five years since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, and I know many of us are still living with the effects of that extraordinary and unprecedented time. The Government has designated Sunday 9 March as a National Day of Reflection to mark the fifth anniversary. We are being invited to use the day as an opportunity to remember those who lost their lives to Covid-19 and reflect on the lasting impact of the pandemic on so many people. Churches are encouraged to get involved in creative ways, and the Church of England has written a range of prayers for the day. There are also social media images and posters to mark the anniversary. Churches are also invited to toll a bell to mark the end of the minute's silence at 12pm. You can download prayers and find more details here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/national-covid-19-day-reflection>

Exeter Ordination Pathway

The Exeter Ordination Pathway (EOP) is a new ordination training pathway that I am introducing into the Diocese of Exeter. Bishop Martin Seeley and I introduced this pathway in my previous diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, where it has been running for seven years now, producing 70+ priests, without impacting on numbers undertaking existing ordination pathways.

The Exeter Ordination Pathway is designed for people identified and called out by their local church leadership with a vocation to serve as an assistant priest in their local context. Following a local discernment, people recommended for training by their Team Rector (Incumbent) and PCC will then go through the national discernment process before undertaking 12 months of part-time ordination formation delivered by the Bishop of Exeter and others.

Those who have no formal theological training will also take essential modules in biblical studies and other areas the discernment process may recommend. Towards the end of the formation year the bishop will discern with them whether the time is right to be ordained and, if so, they would be ordained to the diaconate and then join the curate programme of ongoing training and formation.

The pathway is aimed at people who are settled in their local community and do not anticipate moving. It would not suit people with a vocation to a deployable role, for example an incumbent or Self-Supporting Ordained Minister (SSOM) whose circumstances might mean a move is likely at some stage to another context or diocese.

The EOP is being introduced from September 2025 with a small cohort, which has already been formed, before being opened up more widely across the diocese for September 2026. (More about this nearer the time). It is part of our strategy to provide resources and re-ignite the local church to be the witness and praying community it is called to be, for the sake of others.

Experienced lay ministers who are wondering about a vocation to ordained ministry should first consult their incumbent and PCC to discern together whether this might be an ordained vocation and, if so, the suitability of this pathway. Part-time and full-time training for deployable roles will still be the main ways people are prepared for ordained ministry, and the Vocations Officer and Diocesan Director of Ordinands will support candidates in this process.

Key criteria are:

- The sense of call is discerned largely locally to serve locally.
- Those called are committed to their locality/parish and do not anticipate moving.
- People entering discernment will already be exercising ministry locally, for example as LLM, church warden, member of a pastoral care team, chaplain, leader of a house group or in work with children, young people and families. They will have the

confidence of the congregation(s) in which they are set and that of the incumbent – this is a large part of the discernment.

- There will be a sense that this person is already ministering in an implicitly priestly way and does not need the usual training for ordination but a shortened experience of formation to help them step fully into that priestly role.

There is an FAQs document about the new ordination pathway attached to this Ad Clerum. Information about it will be shared more widely in the next few weeks. Here is the link to the new EOP page on the diocese website: <https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/exeter-ordination-pathway-eop/>

This comes with my continued thanks and ongoing prayers for your ministry,

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Exon". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Bishop Mike