



Lent Ad Clerum

5 March 2025

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Mt 28:19-20

Lent

To begin with, a joyful Lent to you. Lent is that time when we prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's often associated with disciplines of self-denial, purifying our hearts and minds to receive afresh the Good News of Easter. And, for some, such self-denial dovetails with more secular hopes such as shedding a few pounds and decreasing alcohol consumption etc. But Lent derives from the Old English *lencten*, meaning 'lengthen' and referred to the lengthening of daylight with the approach of Spring. Lent is indeed a season of penitence, but it is also a season of growth and renewal. And it is hopefully joyful too, because the point of our resolutions is to deepen our relationship with God (a God of joy!) and one another. Indeed, one piece of advice about a good Lent that has stayed with me is more intentionally to delight and savour God and the things of God.

And, in deepening our relationship with God, Lent inevitably is also about being renewed in our life of prayer. In this regard I would urge you through Lent to be dedicated in prayer for what feels like a watershed moment in the international world order. Each day seems to bring fresh possibilities for instability and insecurity, with deeply concerning implications for the most vulnerable on our planet, whether because of human conflict, ecological devastation or economic woes. Please keep those most at risk from high-handed diplomatic and self-centred economic decisions in your prayers through this period, and indeed those in positions to make a difference through their leadership.

Five Priorities

As I have travelled around Devon, familiarising myself with the diocese and the county, a regularly recurring question has been “What is your vision for the diocese?” I’m a little hesitant to respond, not least as the diocese already has a vision: growing in prayer, making new disciples and serving the people of Devon with joy. That vision has evolved over the last five years, with a widespread post-pandemic listening consultation leading to the development of the 'Next Steps' strategy to support mission communities to flourish and be sustainable for generations to come. It’s a vision that fits with Jesus’ commission in Mt.28.16-20, which is authoritative for me and I’m sure for many.

For me it all begins with prayer which enables us through God’s grace to be and to do that which of our own accord we cannot be or do. I hope to distribute a “credit card” version of the following prayer to as many as possible across the diocese – please consider praying this prayer on a regular basis in your Christian community – such prayer makes *all* the difference;

God of mission

Who alone brings growth to your Church

Send your Holy Spirit to give

Vision to our planning,

Wisdom to our actions,

Power to our witness.

Help your Church here in Devon

To grow deeper in faith and prayer,

To grow new disciples, to grow leaders,

To grow younger and to grow in joyful service

Of our local community,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Putting flesh on the bones of the vision, I would like to articulate five particular priorities for this next season of our life together. First, **missional leadership**: equipping and resourcing the ordained and lay leaders of our Christian communities as best as we can to develop disciples and make new disciples. Second, developing a “**missional DNA**” across our Christian communities, encouraging outward-looking, invitational churches, hospitable to outsiders and engaged with their wider communities. Third, cultivating an intentional **vocational culture** so that we are not asking whether God is calling me/us, but “To what is God calling me/us now?” Fourth, **children and young people** being placed at the heart of our life, mission and ministry. And fifth, **a mixed ecology**: understanding that we need different ways of doing and being Church. Alongside time-honoured Church we need all sorts of Christian communities which can engage with the 95% of our population who are as yet unengaged.

I hope that these five priorities will become embedded at every level of our ministry. I look forward to discussing them with you and hearing examples of where these priorities are

already evident, as I continue to travel around the diocese visiting mission communities and clergy, and as we gather together for study days and other events.

I hope to outline these priorities for the diocese further at the Diocesan Synod on 23 March and in a subsequent video. Meanwhile you can read in more detail about each of these priorities here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/bishop-mikes-five-strategic-priorities/>

Roots, Shoots and Fruits: Diocesan Clergy Conference

15 -18 June 2026

I am very much looking forward to welcoming all licensed clergy to our quadrennial clergy conference, which will be taking place from 15-18 June 2026 at the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester. Our planning team is working hard to put together a great line-up of speakers and workshops, as well as plenty of opportunities to worship, learn and be inspired together. More details presently. My expectation is that all of us who share in a stipendiary ordained ministry in the Diocese should see attendance at the Clergy Conference as a requirement of our office. Please make it a priority by putting the date in your diary now!

Commissioned Roles

Last weekend I was delighted to share in the first commissioning service for a Growing Faith Leader for Children and Families in the Diocese of Exeter. It is one of a number of new lay commissioned roles we are launching in a variety of ministries. Others include Evangelism and Mission, and the already established Anna Chaplaincy ministry to older people. It's based on good research within the Church of England that has shown that leadership in specialist areas of ministry will help lead our churches into growth, in depth of faith and number. Training for the new commissioned roles will include the diocesan Foundations course, alongside specialist training from key partners like South West Youth Ministries, the Church Mission Society or Bible Reading Fellowship. Please consider who in your congregations might be called to one of these new roles. You can find more information about Lay Commissioned Roles here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/lay-ministry/lay-commissioned-roles/>

St Boniface Awards

Our St Boniface Awards honour lay people who are going above and beyond to serve with joy in our churches, church schools and wider community. The annual celebration service in the Cathedral every June is a highlight of the diocesan calendar - when recipients share their inspiring testimonies, receive medals and are admitted into the Company of St Boniface. The nominations window for this year has been extended by a week to **Friday 14 March**. Please consider who you could nominate as a way of thanking them for all they do. You can find an online and paper nomination form here: <https://exeter.anglican.org/who-we-are/company-of-st-boniface/st-boniface-awards-2025/>

Maundy Thursday

Bishop James and I, in company with our colleagues on the senior staff, look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in the Cathedral on Maundy Thursday (17 April) at 10.30am for the Chrism Eucharist, with the customary blessing of oils and renewal of ministerial promises. It will be very special to be able to share in the Eucharist and to seek God's face in prayer. The Cathedral will also host a Chrism Mass for traditionalist clergy in the South-West conducted by Bishop Paul Thomas, Bishop of Oswestry, on Thursday 10 April at 11.00am.

Blessings

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

Bishop Mike