



Holy Week Ad Clerum

26 March 2026

Dear sisters and brothers,

...we (apostles) have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God Col 1.9-10

St Paul in his letter to the Colossians prays they might “lead a life worthy of the Lord” which involves “increasing in the knowledge of God”, and the opportunity to do so is especially present in engaging with the events of this week and Christ’s sacrifice. In order to enter into Christ’s way of life-giving love we need to understand more deeply the meaning of his passion and death for us together with the power of his resurrection to new and eternal life. May God be pleased to increase our knowledge of what he has done for us through Christ, that we may love him more dearly and living out of his love, bear fruit for his glory.

Welcoming our new Archbishop of Canterbury

It was a great privilege and joy to be present at Dame Sarah Mullally’s Installation as the 106th and first female Archbishop of Canterbury on the Feast of the Annunciation. Here in Devon, we marked her installation with the planting of three Magnolia trees (near the Cathedral, at Holy Cross Church, Crediton and in the garden of Hospiscare) and Magnolia trees are associated with joy, renewal and perseverance. Please pray for Sarah’s deepening joy in the Gospel she is called to proclaim, her ongoing renewal through Word and Sacrament and her perseverance through the inevitable trials and tribulations that come with her role.

The War in the Middle East

On Saturday 28th February, America and Israel launched attacks on Iran, the consequences of which are only slowly unfolding, both in the region and here in Europe.

The guiding principles for a just war appear to have been ignored, for they include the following: first that war must be a last resort – claims of a pre-emptive attack based on imminent threat look unconvincing. Second, any war must be declared by a proper authority. Neither the US Congress, nor the United Nations were consulted, nor for that matter were neighbouring countries and traditional allies. And third, and perhaps most importantly, the aims of any war must be clear from the start. As it is, we hear chopping and changing on what such aims are, and it remains unclear. In sum, the principles for a just war do not seem to be fulfilled. Of course, regime change in Iran is desirable, but the underestimation both of Iran and its present regime and of the ramifications of this conflict are becoming plain to see. Meanwhile antisemitic incidents and anti-Muslim hostility increase in our own country, together with an increased strain in interfaith relationships. And even within faith communities, there are tensions between those who have different views and perspectives. So, for example there are those supportive of Israel's need for self-defence and those who point to injustices against the Palestinian people with more illegal settlements in the West Bank and reports of escalating violence and people killed.

The wisdom of George Bell comes to mind at a time like this. He was Bishop of Chichester around the time of the second World War and wrote an essay, *The Church's Function in Wartime*. He argued, essentially, whether in wartime or peace, 'It is the function of the Church at all costs to remain the Church', that the Church 'is bound to proclaim the realities which outlast change.' He stated there is 'no special wartime gospel. It is the gospel for human needs in all times and countries.' Furthermore, the Church 'is charged with a gospel of God's redeeming love. It aims at creating a community founded on love.' Bell's writing is echoed much more recently by the American theologian Stanley Hauerwas who stated, 'the first task of the Church is not to make the world more just, but to be the church'. He argues the church must be a distinct, faithful community, embodying the story of Jesus, a visible, tangible sign of God's peace and truth. (Not of course that Hauerwas was saying the Church is to neglect justice, but it is out of being the Church that the Church is to address justice issues).

These are unstable, anxiety-provoking times and our call at this time, as always is to look to be that community called, gathered, centred and sent by our Lord Jesus Christ. So I ask that you pray fervently for peace, for our link diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf and the wider region, that amidst trial and tribulation local and global you are grounded through Holy Week on Christ's overcoming of the world (John 16.33) and that your faith enables you to be caught up in Christ's loving and hopeful purposes for the world.

Cathedral Matters

You may be aware that the Dean, Jonathan Greener, is retiring in July after eight years of fruitful ministry at the Cathedral for which not only the Cathedral, but the Diocese and

the wider community of Devon are very grateful. Dean Jonathan's final services will be a 10am Eucharist and 4pm Evensong on Sunday 5th July – you are very welcome to attend either (or both!) of these services. I have invited the Very Revd Stephen Waine to be the Interim Dean until Dean Jonathan's replacement has been appointed. Stephen is steeped in experience of being a Dean (in Chichester from 2015-2023) as well as bringing valuable parochial experience (most recently as Rector of six rural churches) and previously as an Archdeacon of Dorset. Welcome Stephen.

It has also been announced that The Venerable Hilary Dawson, who has now returned to the diocese, will serve as Canon Treasurer at the Cathedral for an interim period. Hilary has, until recently, been Archdeacon of Gloucester and a Canon Residentiary of Gloucester Cathedral. She will be well known to many in Exeter Diocese, having been ordained in Exeter and served in parishes here for over a decade. We are delighted that our Cathedral and the wider diocese will benefit from her deep pastoral wisdom. Welcome home Hilary.

And on another note, if you would like to see me thrown off the Norman North tower of the Cathedral to raise funds for conservation of the Cathedral building then please visit the fundraising page <https://www.justgiving.com/page/bishop-mike-harrison> where you will be able to sponsor me for the Cathedral abseil on Saturday 9th May.

Holy Communion

As a Senior Staff team, it has come to our attention that that since Covid, there continues to be a wide diversity of practice around the use of the common cup within Eucharistic services in our diocese. I do recognise the nervousness for some around the resumption of the common cup, especially where there are a significant number of people with health issues in the congregation. Given that we are now six years on from the beginning of the Covid pandemic, I would now ask that the practice of offering the common cup resumes across the diocese.

We should not be offering individual cups as this is not our practice (though I am aware that some have) and where intinction is offered (the priest dipping wafer into wine before distribution or individuals dipping for themselves), this should now be replaced with the common cup. Please be aware that to receive in 'one kind' is perfectly acceptable if that is the communicant's preference (bread or wafer only). To do so is still to receive communion in full, even where wine is not consumed. This means that it is perfectly in order for communicants to receive only bread and decline the cup temporarily if they are feeling unwell. Where it is not happening, I would ask that the common cup resumes as soon as possible.

Pray Grow Serve 2035

We launched our Pray Grow Serve 2035 vision in January and since then we have held three information/Q&A webinars, as well as discussing it at Bishop's Diocesan Council and Diocesan Synod and a number of deanery synods. It has been encouraging to see the level of positive engagement with the five missional priorities and to hear about great missional projects already happening across the diocese. Work is underway by the SMMiB programme board to implement the specific interventions funded by the SMMiB grant. We will be providing regular updates about how Pray Grow Serve 2035 is going, but it is important to remember that this is a 10-year strategy, so not everything will happen at once!

You can find everything you need to know about Pray Grow Serve 2035 here:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/who-we-are/pray-grow-serve-2035/>

We will also soon be publishing a Pray Grow Serve 2035 discussion template for churches to use at PCC meetings/vision evenings/clergy chapter meetings etc.

Maundy Thursday

I and my colleagues on the senior staff look forward to seeing you in the Cathedral on Maundy Thursday for the annual service of the Blessing of Oils and the Renewal of Baptismal and Ministerial Promises. May our crucified and risen Lord renew us all with his grace and enable us "to bear fruit in every good work".

*The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.*

From 'Jesus of the Scars' by Edward Shillito

Blessings

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Exon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning of the first name.

Bishop Mike