



Summer Ad Clerum

16 July 2026

Dear sisters and brothers,

...The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat". Mk 6.30-31

I don't think I've ever been in a situation of such busyness or freneticism that I had "no leisure even to eat," but occasionally a meal has been skipped or a snack snatched on the hoof. It is however no way to sustain a life or a ministry, and while there are inevitably seasons of more intense activity in the work we undertake, we need to find a rhythm that works for us personally, which provides that elbow-room, space and margin to enable us to "come away...and rest awhile". I will be taking a couple of weeks away in August and I do hope and pray that this summer might include a time for you to "rest a while," conscious of our Lord's rhythms of engagement and withdrawal.

I'd also like to invite you to grab a coffee (or other iced drink) and enjoy watching our recent clergy conference highlights video. The conference, which happens every four years, is one of the key ways we try to support, resource and sustain our hardworking clergy and find time to 'come away' and rest a while together. Here's the link:

<https://vimeo.com/1209606221/9617cee8b3> And my thanks to the planning team for putting on such an exceptional conference this year.

Exeter Ordination Pathway and ordained vocations

Some of you will have been present at the cathedral recently for the ordinations of twenty people to the diaconate and eleven people to the priesthood – a wonderful occasion and cause for celebration and thanksgiving. We look set for similar if not higher numbers next year, which somewhat bucks the trend nationally with the Church desperately in need of fostering more vocations to the ordained ministry – both to make up for a "bump" in

retirements over the next few years and to reverse a steadily decreasing number of people offering for ordination in the last decade. Can I encourage you to look around you and reflect prayerfully on who you know who might be appropriately equipped (or equip-able!) for such a ministry and consider raising the question with them?

And a reminder of our very own Exeter Ordination Pathway (EOP) 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 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.

The pathway is aimed at people who are settled in their local community and do not anticipate moving. Those 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.

See this link for key criteria and further information:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/ministry/exeter-ordination-pathway-eop/>

Promoting Unity in our Nation

Many commentators have described contemporary Britain as 'Divided', 'struggling' and 'broken', and there is a pessimism about the state of our nation, spawning amongst some a deep angst about our identity and future. We are on the brink of welcoming a new prime minister into office and closer to home we have recently experienced the shocking murder of a prominent political figure, Ann Widdecombe, here in Devon. We do not know what lies ahead.

In my own travels around the diocese some people have articulated their own fears about a febrile, fragmenting and polarising dynamic across the nation which invites caricature, disrespect and worse. All of this easily leads to the blaming of particular groups for the ills of society at large, including the scapegoating of certain minority groups. Furthermore, research has highlighted extremely high levels of distrust in almost all British institutions. Eighty-seven per cent of Britons say that they have little to no faith in politicians. Rising poverty and wealth inequality is a further driver of dissatisfaction and division. In this situation, as witnesses to the Prince of Peace and followers of Jesus' way, we need to make a conscious effort to strengthen our social relations, identify shared values and ways of pursuing the common good.

During hospitality week I met with leaders from various faith communities as part of this effort, looking to ensure we stay in touch with one another, maintain cordial relationships

and are networked and ready should there be specific and timely moments when we need to visibly underline our solidarity. The recent General Synod meeting in York considered this and provided some practical resources for churches seeking to promote unity. They can be found here <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-07/promoting-unity-practical-resources-july2026-.pdf>

If you have specific issues around social cohesion in your parish context or are doing something to encourage unity that it would be good to share, I would love to hear from you by email; bishop.of.exeter@exeter.anglican.org

It's also important that we don't allow ourselves to be cast into a slough of despond about humanity here – so here's a poem from Donna Ashworth entitled "good" just to redress *the balance*;

*Most people are good.
Most people kiss their pets goodbye
and read just one more bedtime story to their children.
Most people visit their grandparents even when they have no time and stop by to check on
quiet friends, after a day too long and draining.
Most people return their shopping trolleys, despite being already late and let someone with
only one item, jump to the front of a queue.
Most people give money when money is scarce and most people worry about people they
don't even know, day in and day out.
When the world seems bad, remember,
most people are good.*

The heatwave

Don't get me wrong – I love the sunshine – and apparently it builds up vitamin D, releases serotonin, regulates sleep and elevates mood. But once again records for high temperatures are being broken and we are reminded of how, environmentally, we are in need of different ways of living if we are to hand on our world in fit condition to our children's children. It was well put by the environmental policy advisor Gus Speth who said "I used to think that the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy....and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation – and we scientists don't know how to do that". Again, General Synod looked at this in its recent York sessions and discussed the paper *Hope for Creation* - which is well worth a read, in terms of outlining the environmental crises and challenges, an Anglican theological engagement with these challenges and a call to action, whether individual, communal, national or global. The pdf can be found here; <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/gs-2450-hope-for-all-creation.pdf>

One practical step you can take is to organise or host a screening of **The People's Emergency Briefing**. This is a powerful new film bringing together leading expert insights on the climate and nature crisis into a single, accessible narrative.

Designed for community screening, the film presents the national implications of climate and nature breakdown alongside credible, hopeful responses. It combines expert contributions with real audience reactions, helping viewers not only understand the scale of the crisis, but begin conversations about how to respond together.

The Church of England's Environment Programme has created a resource pack for churches about how best to host a screening and discussion and says "Churches have always played a vital role in times of national challenge; offering care, refuge and a moral voice. The climate crisis is no different. The Church is called to be a prophetic voice and leading by example, show that a different way of living is possible. It affects every part of society, from health and wellbeing to food systems and national security and calls for both practical action and spiritual reflection. As trusted community spaces, churches are uniquely placed to host screenings, and this is a chance to welcome those who may not usually cross the threshold to create space for meaningful dialogue." You can download the resource pack here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/blog/hosting-peoples-emergency-briefing-new-resource-churches>

Visit to Melanesia

It may seem ironic to move from writing about environmental concerns to speaking about a long-haul trip to the Solomon Islands, but this is one of our close diocesan links and there has been no visit by the Bishop of Exeter for 15+ years. I will be visiting the Solomon Islands in August, not least to learn how the effects of climate change are impacting Melanesia (especially with rising sea levels) but also to see how the churches there have been working effectively to make a difference and to find out how we can play our part in supporting them. My wife Rachel will be representing the Mother's Union (MU) and we will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the MU while there (and Mary Sumner day, 9th August). Following this trip, I hope to share both the sobering challenges faced by the Melanesian Church and the joys and inspiration of their faithful witness to Christ, not least as embodied by the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Community of the Sisters of Melanesia. You can read more about the climate change work of the Devon-based charity the Melanesian Mission here: <https://www.mmuk.net/>

Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)

Just a reminder of the work undertaken by our Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC), in resourcing the management of church buildings, and the Faculty process for permission to carry out repairs or make changes. The DAC recognises that both the clergy and

churchwardens play key roles in energising projects, and they are keen to build relationships early in any such process. The process of repairs, renewals and renovations needs to navigate issues such as statutory heritage protection and a good overview of the operation of the system is contained in an article from The Building Conservation Directory, published in 2023

<https://www.buildingconservation.com/books/churches2023/17/>

The DAC offers guidance, expert advice, site visits, procedural support and knowledgeable help to parishes, with a view to ensuring that the necessary documentation is provided and the steps in the advice and permissions process, including essential external consultations, are taken in the right order. Unlike the secular planning system this advice is available throughout the process of developing a project, and other than paying a faculty fee on application it is provided entirely free of charge to the parish. The DAC advisers are all volunteers in this role, so advice comes from people who are committed to sustaining the work of the Church.

Significant resources are available at the Exeter Diocese website,

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/church-buildings/>

and more on the website of the Church of England

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare>.

Our DAC is exceptionally well resourced with expert advisers on every subject from bells and organs to trees and archaeology, electrics and heating, and the advice can be tapped by contacting the Church Buildings Office by e mail or 'phone. The DAC encourages all parishes to start a conversation at the earliest possible stage in developing ideas for works to their church building. Early advice can, in particular, avoid the frustrations and costs of developing ideas that may go on to be problematic.

Festival of Creation in Christ

Finally, some words from the liturgical material recently agreed at General Synod to mark the new Festival of Creation in Christ designated for the 1st Sunday in September. The Feast's title reminds us that we are not called to worship the created order or merely to offer lament for ecological crisis. Rather, we come before God to give thanks for the divine act of creation, to behold all things as made through Christ the Word, and to treat the world as gift, covenant, and responsibility. Creation must be cherished because it is created in Christ, sustained in Christ, wounded by human sin, and destined for renewal in Christ.

May God the Father, whose glory is proclaimed in the heavens, awaken in you a delight and wonder in this good creation. Amen.

May God the Son, the Word made flesh, through whom all things were made, fill you with his risen life. Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the waters of creation and formed the world from chaos, form you in the likeness of Christ and renew the face of the earth. Amen.

Blessings

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Exon". The "M" is stylized with a large loop, and the "Exon" is written in a cursive-like script.

Bishop Mike