



Autumn Ad Clerum

1 October 2026

Dear sisters and brothers,

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7.37-39

Jesus' imagery here puts me in mind of how St Bernard of Clairvaux writes about us being reservoirs more than canals – i.e. storing up God's grace towards us and our awareness of it being like a reservoir of abundance out of which we might bless and serve others without becoming empty. Making space then so our hearts and minds are brim-ful of God and relationship with him. Jesus' pattern of engagement and withdrawal through His own ministry suggests this dynamic of being filled and overflowing too. In similar vein though speaking of kindling the light of Christ, Madeleine L'Engle observes: "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

I hope through this usually busy period of Harvest, Remembrance, Kingdom Season, Advent and Christmas you will have space to be more reservoir than canal, to be filled and thence to overflow, to kindle the light that others might bask in it.

Year of Missional DNA: Advent 2026 – Nov 2027

Some of you (hopefully!) will be aware that with our Pray, Grow Serve 2035 Vision we have as our five missional priorities missional leadership, missional DNA, vocations, children and young people and the mixed ecology.

This last year we have done some work on Missional Leadership – not least launching the Exeter Leadership Development Programme (ELDP), introducing a local ordination

pathway and underlining new commissioned lay leadership roles. This next (Church) year from Advent 2026, (while not neglecting the other 4 priorities!) a keen spotlight will be put on Missional DNA.

What does “Missional DNA” mean? It means being caught up in the love of God for the world He sent his Son to bring home to Himself – whether as individuals or as churches - and that means being caught up in the life and work of Jesus in the power of His Spirit, 24/7. What does that look like? Well it looks like growing in Jesus’ character (e.g. courses to deepen our discipleship, striving to embody a particular teaching of Jesus...), it looks like bearing the fruit of the Spirit – (e.g. embodying love, joy and peace as well as generosity - see forthcoming Bishop’s Lent Appeal, Common Fund Review, neighbourliness...), and it looks like realising that everyday life is the place for our faithful interaction with Jesus and place of following Jesus (e.g. forthcoming Bishop’s Lent Quiet Days on spiritual practices). And of course it is about sharing in Jesus’ mission too – witnessing to our faith and being willing to proclaim the good news in sensitive and timely ways, whether as individuals or as churches.

Through the year there will be resources and opportunities to equip Christian communities to embody a Missional DNA, which are not so much about “doing more” as “doing with God”. One way of doing so I have been commending at Deanery Synods is through a prayer (originally from Richard Halverson) to be said together (e.g. post-communion) and individually memorised over time as a helpful trigger for keeping God’s presence and influence at the fore in daily life;

(You go nowhere by accident)

Wherever you go, God is sending you.

Wherever you are, God has put you there.

Christ who indwells you has something He wants to do with you where you are.

Believe this, and go in His love, His grace and His power, Amen

Advent Course online

I will be offering an online Advent course for any churches (or individuals) who would like to take part – hopefully this will be particularly of interest for smaller congregations unable to put their own course on or for those who can’t get to such a group for one reason or another. Watch out for the relevant links which will be shared soon in the Roots, Shoots & Fruits newsletter, on social media and such like.

To help us go deeper in our discipleship this season and perhaps offer a fresh perspective beyond the fairy lights and crib scenes, I want to focus on what Advent before the 18th century always focused upon, known as ‘the last things’, i.e. death, hell, judgement and heaven, one per week. The subject matter may be heavy, but the teaching will be accessible and thought-provoking. I’ll provide input online for up to 40 mins with slides and then, if you are watching as a group, you can take whatever time

you agree for discussion. The dates are 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd December, 7.30pm – 8.15pm

Bishop's Lent Appeal

When visiting our link diocese of Thika in Kenya earlier this year I was particularly impressed by the Churches and Community Mobilisation Project (CCMP) which Tearfund has sponsored across different parts of Africa and which are now largely diocesan-run initiatives. This chimes with our Missional DNA priority.

I have seen elsewhere how CCMP enables (particularly poor) local churches and their wider communities to make economic and spiritual leaps forward by mobilising local resources, empowering communities and reducing dependency. CCMP has proved to be a positive and dynamic agent of change, and I will be launching a Bishop's Lent Appeal for CCMP projects in our link diocese of Thika for Lent 2027. I will be inviting churches and individuals to join in the 40-day appeal by praying for mission and ministry in Thika and giving generously to support our Christian brothers and sisters. This will be a good way of living out our Missional DNA priority

Of course there is no obligation to participate, but any and every church can engage in this and there will be resources published in good time to enable you to take part. (It could be as simple as an extra retiring collection at services or something much more involved).

Artificial Intelligence

A lot has been said about the opportunities and dangers of Artificial Intelligence recently and indeed the College of Bishops this September devoted some of its 4 days to consideration of such issues. For those interested I'll be using my Presidential Address at the Diocesan Synod on Sat 12th October to go into this area a bit further and so if you're interested watch out for it on the website. I promise my words will be my own!

Devon Community Foundation (DCF)

Just in case you are unaware, I want to draw your attention to the Devon Community Foundation (DCF). DCF is the largest independent grant funder for charities and community organisations in the county, created by our communities and for our communities. Community foundations exist to bring together people and organisations wanting to make a positive difference where they live and work through place-based philanthropy.

DCF works with donors and funding partners who care about Devon and want their money to strengthen communities and tackle inequality in the county. DCF uses their knowledge of the community and voluntary sector in Devon to turn donations into grants that go to grassroots organisations, creating change in the heart of their communities.

Last financial year DCF gave out 217 grants worth a total of £1.2 million. They are also growing an endowment fund to ensure they can continue to give grants for generations to come. In March 2026, the DCF endowment fund was worth £9m and generated £408k for grants in 2025/26.

DCF have helped resource various church initiatives previously and we have a good working relationship with DCF 'on the ground'. If you're interested in knowing more about DCF and how they might help with (for example) our aim of "serving the people of Devon with joy" then do contact them - info@devoncf.com.

St Francis of Assisi

We remember at this time the 800th anniversary of one of the most remarkable witnesses to the Christian faith – Francis of Assisi. And to conclude a prayer of his that he would use on entering any church;

We adore You, most holy Lord Jesus Christ, here, and in all Your churches throughout the world, and we bless You, because by Your holy Cross, You have redeemed the world. Amen.

Blessings

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

Bishop Mike