

27 February 2013

To the Clergy No 10

copied to diocesan staff, lay chairs, and the clergy of Yaxley Deanery

Dear friends

Greetings to you as we journey through Lent. I look forward to seeing many of you on Maundy Thursday at the Cathedral and for lunch afterwards.

God's World and Ours

I'm just back from four days walking in the Lake District, being refreshed and invigorated by God's wonderful creation. Those who know the Lake District will realize that the phrase "God's wonderful creation" isn't completely accurate. The beautiful landscape reflects intensive human use over many generations: farming and mining, forestry and damming, life and leisure. What remains is a very remarkable place, but it reminds us that we as the pinnacle of God's creation affect the rest of it very much – both for good and for ill. Even at the very local level of our gardens and churchyards we are making a difference. I do commend the various initiatives to encourage conservation on the land we are called to care for.

Thank You

I have written a piece for the March parish magazine resource, but I'm conscious that some clergy don't see that, so I want to repeat the gist of it here. Last year saw another welcome rise in our parish share collection rate despite the clear beginnings of the government's austerity policies. I am very grateful to all involved in that, not least to the clergy who faithfully teach giving as part of discipleship. Thank you.

Archbishop of Canterbury

Justin Welby is now Archbishop of Canterbury, and his public duties will begin following his enthronement on 21 March. Please join me in praying for him in this hugely demanding role.

Communion by Extension

Following my blanket permission for Communion by Extension last Christmas I have decided to extend that to Easter as well, and to every Christmas Day and Easter Day until further notice. In all cases the relevant PCC must agree, the service must be led according to the Common Worship provision by a Deacon or a Reader, and the elements should have been consecrated at a service on the eve of the festival or on the day itself. I hope this is a real help in enabling every parish to offer Holy Communion at Easter and Christmas. At the same time I remind you that at other times of year you should ask on each occasion that Communion by Extension is contemplated: this was the basis on which General Synod and the House of Bishops agreed to introduce this provision.

Bishops' Sunday Visits

Both Bishop John and I are happy to commit most Sundays to visiting parishes. There does not need to be a special occasion and we don't insist on any minimum number of confirmation candidates. It is good to be part of benefice services, but over time we do want to visit every church in the diocese not just the bigger ones. We normally need a few months' notice to manage a particular date, but we are happy to accommodate specific requests made nearer the time – for example to include confirmations in a “normal” Sunday Eucharist or to speak to a particular theme.

My role as an assistant bishop in Ely Diocese means that I am free to accept invitations to the parishes south of the Nene but within the boundaries of the City of Peterborough. These visits can also be for “normal” Sundays, for confirmations, or for special events.

Ministry Development Reviews

Those of you on Common Tenure (other than training curates), and those with Freehold who have opted into the MDR scheme, will have a Consultant Assisted Review every year, and a Senior Staff (Episcopal) Review every third year. I hope this relatively new system will be of real benefit. I certainly value my own annual review. The administration of this system can be quite burdensome. Some dioceses have employed people full- or part-time to manage this. I am very reluctant to do that, but this does mean that we have to rely on the clergy to respond to letters and e-mails and to arrange meetings with their reviewers in a timely way. Please help us in this way to keep our admin costs down.

Spirituality and Spiritual Direction

There is apparently still some confusion regarding this. Let me clarify. There are various people and groups offering spiritual direction, and clergy are free to go wherever they wish for this service. However, Sister Rachel Overton is my Adviser in Spirituality. She is accountable to me for this work, unlike many who offer training and spiritual direction but are not accountable to anyone. The training, supervision and brokerage Sister Rachel offers in spiritual direction come with my endorsement and my full confidence. She will soon be running training as part of a joint initiative between us and Leicester Diocese: I warmly commend this.

Diocesan Strategy and Vision

People ask from time to time whether we have a diocesan strategy or vision. I am not a fan of detailed strategy at the diocesan level. The parish is the natural unit of church life and growth. Deanery and Diocese do matter in lots of ways, but people come to faith through, and experience most of their church life at, the parish level. The Bishop and Diocese should enable, facilitate and encourage strong, faithful and

viable parish life. I want to encourage parishes to develop their own lives and strengths within a culture of unity, growth and mutual respect.

I have recently produced a paper entitled “Ministry in the Diocese of Peterborough” setting out how I see the culture of the Diocese. This goes alongside every parish profile to clergy who are considering posts in the diocese. I am appending it to this letter for your interest and would be grateful for any comments and for open discussion so that it can be developed and improved over time.

Ministry in Schools

You will see in my “Ministry in the Diocese of Peterborough” paper that I encourage all clergy to be as involved as they can with the schools in their parishes. The very heavy demands on chairs of governors these days make me think that this is rarely the best role for a parish priest. However an informal chaplaincy role, supporting the Head and staff, advising on RE, and taking regular assemblies, should be part of the core business of the clergy. Many non-church schools welcome this sort of involvement from their local parish and I hope all clergy will work at building and maintaining the necessary relationships to make this happen. Our involvement with all schools, not just church schools, is and should be a central part of our mission.

Archdeacon of Northampton

You will have seen that Archdeacon Christine is retiring this autumn. I am working with others on a job description for her successor, and expect to be advertising the job (on our website and in the Church Times) this spring. There will be an official service of farewell and thanks to Christine at 3.00pm on Saturday 21 September at Holy Trinity & St Paul, Northampton. More details will be out later, but please note the date now.

Bishops’ Office Staff

We have made some changes to the way the staff work in the Bishops’ office. In general Alex Low is full time as my PA, while Cheryl Craggs (Chel – pronounced Shel) works about three-quarters time for Bishop John and a quarter-time for me. Alex still looks after my diary and administration, but Chel now looks after Bishop John’s. To contact Bishop John it is best to go through Chel at the Bishops’ Office in Peterborough.

In addition Cheryl Goddard, whom some of you will know from Archdeacon Christine’s office, now also works on Tuesdays as receptionist at Bishop John’s home office in Mears Ashby. He is there most Tuesdays seeing people, so if you see him there you are likely to be welcomed by Cheryl Goddard. Cheryl also deals with the administration of Eucharistic Assistants. Two Cheryls might be more of less confusing depending on your point of view!

Roman Catholic Church

Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are going through a tough time with the resignation of Pope Benedict and now of Cardinal O'Brien. Please join with me in praying for them and supporting them.

With warm greetings in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Donald". The plus sign is on the left, followed by the name "Donald" in a cursive script.

The Rt Revd Donald Allister
Bishop of Peterborough

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Appendix

Ministry in the Diocese of Peterborough

Warm greetings as you explore the possibility of ministry in Peterborough Diocese. Dioceses vary greatly in their culture and their approach to ministry and mission. I hope it will help if I spell out some of our aspirations and expectations. You can find much more detail on our website; this is intended to paint the picture in broad brush strokes.

Roughly speaking the diocese covers Northamptonshire and Rutland as well as the City of Peterborough (which used to be in Northants, is now in Cambridgeshire for ceremonial purposes, but is a unitary authority running its own affairs). The Archdeaconry of Oakham covers Peterborough, Rutland, the boroughs of Corby and Kettering, and the district of East Northants. The Archdeaconry of Northampton covers the boroughs of Northampton and Wellingborough, and the districts of Daventry and South Northants.

The diocese is medium sized in population with a little under a million people, but the rural areas of Northants and Rutland include many very small villages with fine, and usually modestly proportioned, medieval churches. The rural parishes are almost all linked with others in multi-parish benefices. There is one suffragan bishop, John Holbrook, Bishop of Brixworth since 2011, and two archdeacons, Christine Allsopp of Northampton since 2005 and Gordon Steele of Oakham since 2012.

I came to the diocese in early 2010 with a brief both from the diocese and from the Archbishop of Canterbury to reverse the serious decline in churchgoing and to instil a greater sense of diocesan identity and unity.

Clergy morale is very important to us. I visit all licensed clergy in their homes every three years on a purely pastoral basis. We talk about “shared episcopate” and I encourage rural deans and parish clergy to be leaders in mission, confidently getting on with ministry. I am radically revising the former *Bishop’s Regulations* into *Diocesan Guidelines*. We have scrapped plans to reduce clergy numbers further, and are actively increasing the number of ordinations and of parochial clergy.

We believe in church growth. All our senior staff saw growth in their earlier parish ministries, and it is our expectation for every healthy church. Rather than a detailed diocesan strategy we are working in terms of a vision for each parish or benefice to develop and own a growth action plan. Interdependency and a shared belonging and commitment to mission are important, but each local unit should have its own aspiration to being a growing, viable, missional, serving and worshipping community.

We have ended the previous informal episcopal area scheme, and both bishops now cover the whole diocese with distinct responsibilities rather than geographic areas. The Bishop of Peterborough takes responsibility for ordinands, curates and clergy in parish ministry. He also has responsibilities outside the diocese, most notably chairing the Church of England’s Council for Christian Unity from 2013. The Bishop of Brixworth is responsible for retired clergy, chaplaincies and lay ministry and chairs the diocesan mission and pastoral committee. The Archdeacon of Northampton currently chairs the Diocesan Board of Education, and the Archdeacon of Oakham has spiritual oversight of financial matters including parish share issues across the diocese.

The Bishop and the Dean, Charles Taylor, work closely together, and we seek to present the Cathedral (even though geographically it is very much at one end of a long and narrow diocese) as the spiritual centre of diocesan life. Most of our licensed clergy come to the Renewal of Ordination Vows and the Blessing of the Oils on Maundy Thursday Morning, then move next door for a cooked lunch in the Bishop’s Palace. The retired clergy come to the Cathedral for a summer Eucharist then lunch in the Palace. The licensed clergy return in the autumn for a day of worship, teaching and fellowship with another cooked lunch. Ordinands come to two social events at the Palace each year, and deacons and priests are all ordained in the Cathedral at Pentecost.

As we look for and encourage clergy to join the diocese we look for certain commitments:

- to be involved in deanery and diocesan activities and in the life of the local community
- to aim and work for growth in numbers and in depth of discipleship among the worshipping community

- to be involved in both church and community schools as far as possible (preferably with a chaplaincy and assembly-leading role rather than chairing the governing body)
- to take part in the diocesan ministry review process which involves an annual consultant assisted review and a three-yearly senior staff review
- to engage with the continuing ministerial development programme offered by the diocese
- to undergo safeguarding training as required by the bishop and to follow and promote the diocesan safeguarding policy.

We look forward to meeting and welcoming those who share our values and want to serve the Lord, the Church and the Gospel with us.

+ Donald

Bishop of Peterborough