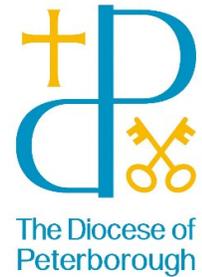


1 June 2016

From Bishop Donald To the Clergy No 17



Dear friends

This is the latest of my occasional letters to the clergy of our diocese. I copy these letters for information to some other people: deanery lay chairs, diocesan lay staff, and the clergy of Yaxley Deanery (the area of Ely Diocese which includes the southern third of the City of Peterborough - I share with the Bishop of Ely in offering pastoral care to these parishes).

On this occasion I am also copying in our licensed lay ministers, and those being ordained deacon later this month. This is because I particularly want to share with them the first three sections (*My Sabbatical*, *Ordinations* and *Changes to Bishops' Responsibilities*). If you are one of those folk, feel free to read on beyond the third section, but you don't have to! (Though LLMs may also like to note the very last section, on our next Ministers' Conference.)

There is quite a lot in this letter. I realise that not every section will be relevant to everyone, but do please persevere!

My Sabbatical

I'm looking forward to my sabbatical this summer, my first such break in 40 years of ordained ministry. I'll be doing some hill walking, and some study of 17th century theology and its application to today's ecumenical and liturgical debates. Including a retreat, a holiday, and a week visiting our link diocese in South Korea, I shall be off duty from 13 June, returning to work on 3 October.

I have delegated to Bishop John Holbrook everything that I can legally delegate. He has done a great job looking after Leicester Diocese during their recent vacancy, and I have full confidence in him. In effect he will be Acting Diocesan Bishop while I am off, though he and my office team can contact me if absolutely necessary. I am also grateful to Bishop John Flack, who in retirement has carried some extra load since last summer, and will continue to do so while I am away.

Ordinations

My absence means that Bishop John Holbrook will be the Ordaining Bishop for this year's ordinations of priests on 25 June and of deacons on 26 June. Those ordinands who have not yet met him will be doing so before the ordinations. I am delighted that Canon Bill Croft, one of our most experienced clergy, and a former DDO and Cathedral Precentor, will be leading the ordination retreat and preaching at the ordinations this year.

Changes to Bishops' Responsibilities

Most of you will know that I operate a cabinet or portfolio system within the Bishop's Management Group. While I retain ultimate responsibility for everything that goes on in the life of the diocese, it makes sense to share out most areas of work among the senior team. We discuss all these matters at our monthly meetings, and when necessary in between meetings; but each of us holds the day-to-day oversight of certain areas of our diocesan life, usually including the line-management of one or more of our excellent Directors (Education, Mission, Ordinands & Vocations, Training). Every now and then I think it right to move these areas of responsibility around, and I am doing so over this summer and autumn.

Archdeacon Gordon will keep his responsibility for spiritual oversight of diocesan finance, including parish share. Archdeacon Richard will also keep his role of oversight of our Mission Team, including chairing the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. Bishop John will retain his responsibility as Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education, and I will continue oversight of the Training Team. Canon Tim Alban Jones, my Chaplain, will keep his responsibility for pastoral care of the clergy.

But this summer when I go on sabbatical I will hand over to Bishop John the responsibility for work with ordinands, curates, and the Vocations Team. My intention is that he will continue in this role when I return, although I will resume my role as Ordaining Bishop from next summer after this year's break. Thus, from this month, Bishop John will work closely with DDO Canon Steve Benoy and Curate Training Officer Guli Francis-Dehqani, deciding on sending people to selection conferences, helping ordinands find suitable curacies, and monitoring and eventually signing off those curacies.

In exchange I shall take on the oversight of Lay Ministry when I return from sabbatical. This will not just involve licensing Lay Ministers each September, but also working with the Training Team on their training, working with the Wardens of lay ministry, and looking at how we can grow and develop lay ministry to be as strong and effective as possible.

Bishops' Visits and Confirmation Services

This is to remind you, and to tell those fairly new to incumbency in the diocese, that we as bishops are very happy to visit churches for the "normal" service on a "normal" Sunday. A bishop's visit does not have to be for a special event. In the course of those visits we are always happy to confirm, even just one or two people. You don't have to wait for a deanery or diocesan confirmation service: if you would rather see your candidates confirmed in their own church, we are very happy to make that possible. Our diaries are such that we usually need several months' notice, so we are very happy to find that a "normal" service has become a confirmation at fairly short notice, or vice versa.

If you want to book a bishop's visit, please contact my office. Our two PAs work closely together on diary matters, and unless you have a strong preference for either one of us, or you are tied to a particular date, you are likely to be offered a change from whichever of us visited your parish most recently.

In Yaxley Deanery the same applies, except that I have a role and licence there as Assistant Bishop of Ely, whereas Bishop John does not. So if you want to book a visit from a Peterborough bishop, you might have to wait a little longer, but you will always get me.

In the normal course of events I expect Confirmations, especially on Sundays which is when I prefer to do them, to be in context of Holy Communion. It does seem strange to me that the strong link between Confirmation and Communion is often broken at the very moment of

Confirmation. Ultimately I will leave this decision to the parish priest, but those who ask for non-Eucharistic Confirmations can expect to receive a gentle challenge from my Chaplain.

Cathedral Confirmations

With more confirmations happening in parishes there has been reduced take-up for our Cathedral autumn Confirmation services. We cancelled the last two, with only a handful of candidates, and quite a major logistical operation to use the cathedral with its vergers and choir on a Saturday evening. I am therefore scrapping that service. The very popular Easter Eve Confirmation, combined with the Easter Vigil, will of course continue.

Bishops' PAs

This is to let you know of a change of personnel. Archdeacon Gordon's long-serving PA Pat Collishaw retires at the end of July: we wish her well. From 1 August Chel Craggs will move to work for Archdeacon Gordon instead of Bishop John. Chel has been really good as John's PA, and has covered for Alex my PA during her holidays. We will miss her from the Bishops' Office, and we wish her well as she moves down the corridor. We are currently recruiting a new PA for Bishop John, and hope to have someone in place for August.

Link Dioceses

Those of you on Diocesan Synod will be aware of its decision to end the link with the Diocese of Bungoma at the end of this year. Bishop John will be leading a visit at the beginning of October to celebrate 100 years since Anglican missionaries established a church in Bungoma, and that will be the final visit of our official link. I am so grateful to all those who have visited Bungoma over the years and built up that relationship. The Anglican Communion does recommend that these links should be time-limited, and ours with Bungoma has I believe run for 16 years.

Diocesan Synod has approved the setting up of a small group to explore the possibilities of linking with a different diocese in the developing world instead of Bungoma. My Chaplain will be leading this group and would welcome any suggestions you may like to offer.

Our link with Seoul, only 5 years old, will continue for at least another 5 years.

Bishop's Charity

The Bishop's Charity, which receives the collections at Confirmation services and other donations sent to me, will continue to support projects in Bungoma for the rest of this year. It is my intention that the Bishop's Charity next year will be to support Christian mission more locally. I will let you know about that later this year.

Permission for Occasional Ministry

It is time to revisit the issues surrounding invitations to visiting preachers and officiants. Please understand that this is not meant to be an irksome piece of bureaucracy but to enable you to ensure that anyone coming to officiate in your parish is fully compliant with all safeguarding regulations.

I can now offer an exception from the previously stated rules: if you invite a guest preacher to speak, **and you will be present at the service**, you do not need to ask my permission.

For all other invitations to Readers, Clergy or Bishops who do not hold my licence or permission to officiate, you need to contact my office to seek permission. We will check that they are in good standing in their own diocese before giving permission. Normally you will get an answer within a few days at most.

If you are not sure whether someone is licensed or holds permission to officiate, just look them up in our online Diocesan Directory which is kept up to date. If they appear there, all is well. If you can't access the Directory, please ask my office.

Non-Alcoholic Wine at Holy Communion

There has been a request for clarification about the use of non-alcoholic wine at the Eucharist. This was discussed at the Bishop's Management Group and I am issuing the following guideline.

The firm expectation is that under normal circumstances all wine will be "the fermented juice of the grape, good and wholesome" (Canon B17). Those for whom any alcoholic wine would be medicinally harmful can be legally and properly provided with non-alcoholic wine. This is wine from which the alcohol has been extracted and is readily available commercially. This is not the same as using unfermented grape juice or other fruit juices, which are not wine and are neither Scriptural nor Canonical. A very small quantity of non-alcoholic wine can be easily consecrated for such persons in a small chalice (such as the small cup sometimes used in home Communions). This should only be used for the particular communicants for whom it is prepared and not for the whole congregation.

CAR reviewers

I am very grateful to all those who voluntarily offer their time and experience as reviewers in our clergy ministerial development reviews. Their wisdom and insights are greatly valued by many parish clergy. In order that the existing reviewers are not overburdened with too many people to review, I am writing to ask if you know of any people in your parishes who might have the necessary time and aptitude to become a reviewer. If you can identify someone who might be willing to undertake this important form of lay ministry, please be in touch with Chel Craggs in my office before the end of July: cheryl.craggs@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Sermon Series

A number of clergy have mentioned to me the 'tyranny of the lectionary' on Sundays. I commend to you the provision from the Common Worship that during 'ordinary time', following consultation with the PCC, the parish priest "may from time to time depart from the lectionary for pastoral reasons, or preaching or teaching purposes." (Rule 7 Common Worship, p 450). Sermon series, teaching through a book of the Bible or looking at Christian themes, can be very beneficial. If you haven't done this before, *New Pattern for Worship* gives some very good ideas for starters (pp 54-56), but there is great scope for creativity. If you would like to discuss ideas, please contact my chaplain, Canon Tim Alban Jones, who will be pleased to talk to you: 01733 887 014 or tim.albanjones@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Maintenance of Parsonage House Boundary Walls

The Archdeacons have asked me to point out that at a recent meeting of the Houses Committee considerable time was spent discussing the housing budget following the collapse of two substantial and listed garden walls. The loss adjustors appointed by EIG are arguing that the cost of repair must be borne by the diocese; this will be well into six figures. This is money that would otherwise have been available for maintenance and improvements to clergy housing. The housing budget of £1.5m per year is under pressure and difficult decisions always have to be made regarding works that can and cannot be undertaken without putting an additional burden upon parish share. It would be very helpful if all clergy would keep garden walls free from ivy and other vegetation so that we are able to allocate more of our resources to keep clergy housing in a good state of repair. One helpful hint: for the removal of ivy, cut the base and let the ivy die: then it will come off the wall without causing further damage.

EU Referendum – 16 and 23 June

The forthcoming referendum on this country's membership of the EU presents us with a very important choice as individuals and as a nation. I have already put on record three thoughts about the referendum, and I briefly repeat them here.

First, I regret that we are having one. We elect a government and it is their job to govern. I am so glad that we do not practise direct democracy with plebiscites on everything. We have representative democracy where people are chosen and set apart to make decisions and lead.

Second, since the government has handed the decision to us, we have a clear duty to do the research, then to think, pray, and vote. ***I am encouraging the diocese to observe a day of prayer on 16 June, one week before the referendum. It is important to bring this matter and our own voting intentions to God.***

Third, there is a real danger of a disunited country and parliament after the vote, and a real duty for all of us, but especially politicians, to work at staying united as a nation.

Please note that there isn't a fourth point: I'm not suggesting which way you should vote, nor telling you which way I am voting. That is not the job of church leaders, though doubtless some will try. Don't listen to them. Make up your own mind.

The Christian Gospel does have something very important to say on this though. It does not of course deal with whether the UK should be in some sort of economic or political union with the EU. It says something much more important. It tells us of God's great plan to unite all people, indeed all creation, in Christ.

Whatever the outcome of the referendum (and I do have a very strong view about it and will be voting), much more important is that through the debate and in the aftermath we as Christians can be talking about the great unity plan, God's plan, to bring together all people, tribes, races, and languages, to know and love and worship and bow before Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Parish Returns

A big Thank You to the 85% of parishes which completed *Statistics for Mission* returns for 2015. I also encourage those parishes which have not already completed a *Parish Finance Return* to do so as soon as possible. The national Research & Statistics team set a much earlier target date than in the past to enable the national statistics to be produced in a more timely fashion. Though that date (31 May) has now passed, it is not too late, so please do make sure your return is submitted if you can. Both these returns are a great help at diocesan level, as well as nationally, in building a picture of the growth of the Church across our diocese, and your help with them is very much appreciated.

Clergy Day – 10 November

Two years out of three we have a day of fellowship, worship and teaching for all licensed clergy. (The third year sees our Ministers' Conference, described in the next paragraph.) This year's Clergy Day will be in the Cathedral on Thursday 10 November. It will be a full day, with a cooked lunch provided. Details will be available nearer the time, but the main theme will be Vocations. I expect all stipendiary clergy to be present, and warmly invite the self-supporting ministers and chaplains. Please ensure that retired clergy with permission to officiate, or Licensed Readers, are available to take any funerals on that day.

Ministers Conference – 13-16 November 2017

Our three-yearly conference for Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers is just 18 months away. We have a group already at work planning, under the chairmanship of Ben Phillips, Rector of Towcester and the Tove Benefice. There will be Bible studies in John's Gospel from Professor David Ford (an Anglican Reader) who has just retired from the Regius Chair of Theology at Cambridge, also keynote addresses from Bishop Anne Hollinghurst (Birmingham Diocese), Canon Mark Russell (another layman who leads the Church Army), and myself. It looks like another excellent conference in the planning.

Clergy and LLMs should receive the first email from the planning group in mid-June: do look out for that.

With all good wishes for your summer.

Donald