



**From Bishop Donald    To the Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers**

cc     *Bishop's Council, Diocesan and Cathedral Staff, Diocesan Registrar,  
Diocesan and Deanery Lay Chairs, Yaxley Deanery Clergy and Lay Chair*

***Dear friends***

Lenten greetings. As Brexit continues to confuse and perplex, what a joy it was to be reminded on Sunday that "our citizenship is in heaven." Ultimately that is the only politics that makes sense.

What a time we have coming up in just a few weeks! Maundy Thursday, with the last supper, the foot-washing, the astonishing final discourse and high-priestly prayer. Good Friday: the darkest day, the seven last words, suffering made purposeful, the Lamb slain for us. Easter Day: the pivot of history, all creation changed, the renewal of all things begins, "I have seen the Lord!" and "My Lord and my God!" May we all experience anew, know more deeply, and share with others, those transforming events and truths.

**Archbishop's Visit**

Archbishop Justin will be visiting the Diocese from Monday 8 April to Wednesday 10 April. He will be spending Monday in Peterborough and visiting Stocken Prison in Rutland. On Tuesday 9 April he will be in and around Northampton all day, concluding with an open question and answer session for all clergy and lay ministers at Northampton High School at 7.00 pm. If you have any questions you would like to ask the Archbishop, please send them in advance to [tim.albanjones@peterborough-diocese.org.uk](mailto:tim.albanjones@peterborough-diocese.org.uk). This is not to 'vet' the questions, but so that they can be arranged thematically. The session will be chaired by Beverley Hollins, chair of the House of Clergy. On Wednesday 10 April the Archbishop will be visiting Corby before finishing his visit at the Cathedral by speaking at Wednesday at One. This is open to anyone who would like to attend.

**Parish Share**

Our parish share situation is now very serious, with our third successive year of receipts at around 90%, following several years around a much healthier 94-95%. In cash terms this means a shortfall last year of around £900,000. We need the collection rate to start rising again very quickly, but we also need to cut costs some more. We have not filled Rona Orme's post, or Linnet Smith's. Miles Baker's and Liz Holdsworth's jobs have effectively been merged in Charlie Nobbs's new role, but Charlie's previous post will remain vacant. A number of parishes and benefices have been merged, and more will follow. We are trying to ensure that these cuts are strategic, rather than arbitrary or panic-driven, and it is possible that some or all could be reversed when finances improve.

**Ministers' Conference 2020**

The conference is already booked at the same venue as in 2017, and we expect it to cost in the region of £80,000 altogether - good value for 300+ people staying away for four days, and if previous conferences are anything to go by, of huge benefit to many of us - but hard to afford. We have considered cancelling the conference, but cancellation penalties are quite steep, and make that an even more unattractive option than it is anyway. Instead, we are going to request voluntary donations towards the cost from those who attend. When the time

comes to book, the conference will as always be free, but we will ask those who can, to make a contribution based on what they think it is worth.

### **Clergy Permission to Officiate**

New national regulations for granting PTO are coming in, largely driven by safeguarding concerns. Those concerned will receive all the details in due time, but a couple of points are worth noting, as they could affect many parishes.

- In many cases, a licence as assistant priest might be a much more sensible option than PTO. It roots people better in the parish where they normally help, it will be much more straightforward administratively, it secures invitations to the Maundy Thursday clergy lunch and to the three-yearly ministers' conference.
- In future, clergy with neither licence nor PTO will not be permitted to wear robes in church, even if all they do is sit in the choir or sanctuary during the service. It is increasingly important that only those with current permissions and safeguarding credentials are seen as visibly part of the church's ordained ministry. I know that this changes centuries of tradition, and I regret the need for it, but in our generation we have to be seen to take safeguarding seriously.

### **Prison Chaplaincy**

We have a number of vacancies for prison chaplains, full-time and part-time. These are open to clergy or readers. For the right people, this is hugely rewarding and satisfying ministry, Full training will be given. If you might be interested, please let my office know.

### **Lay Ministry**

You will be aware that lay ministry is becoming increasingly flexible. The categories we have been using, such as lay pastoral minister, licensed evangelist, lay worker, are blurring into each other in various ways. I am glad to see this, as it reflects the way that ministry is. We all have areas of specialization or particular gifts, but at times we simply have to do what needs doing. It seems strange that a lay pastoral minister who has been supporting a family through illness and death cannot then take the funeral, even if the ordained minister isn't available. It seems odd that licensed evangelists are not licensed to preach. And it seems odd to make rigid distinctions between roles. So we are now making a number of changes.

From this year onwards, the two-year licensed lay ministry course is becoming more flexible. Those training mainly for pastoral ministry will be able, if they wish and their incumbent agrees, to do the module on funeral ministry which was previously restricted to those training as Readers. Similarly, training in preaching will be open to those training as evangelists. At the end of two years, everyone who completes the course satisfactorily will be licensed as a Lay Minister at the September service in the Cathedral. There will be no distinction on the licence between different ministerial functions. We will know, they will know, and their incumbent will know, which modules they have studied. Their working agreement will specify the range of ministries they will be involved in. Their job title within the parish will be decided between the incumbent and themselves. For some that might continue to be "Pastoral Minister" or "Evangelist." Others may go for "Lay Minister" or "Parish Visitor" or "Funeral Minister" or whatever else seems appropriate in the local context.

Some lay ministers will then do an additional year of study, either straightaway or in the future, to train as a Reader. Readers will continue to be the senior lay ministers, whose training has covered all the options. Readers are admitted to the Order of Readers, and, like priests, they remain in that order for life – although, like priests, they can only minister when they are licensed. Their status as Readers is transferable across the Church of England, and even in some other parts of the Anglican Communion, whereas other lay ministers are only recognized as such in their own diocese, and they cease to be lay ministers if they are not re-licensed every five years.

These new arrangements obviously apply to those in training, and to future candidates. I hope and pray that they will make lay ministry a more attractive prospect, and will help with our recruitment of more (and younger) lay ministers. But they will also begin to apply retrospectively to current lay ministers. Those who are currently serving will be able, if they wish, to broaden their ministries by doing another module or so from the options available, and changing their working agreement. This is part of the lifelong learning culture which we are introducing to lay ministry, and which is one of the reasons for the training elements of our annual Celebration of Lay Ministry in the Cathedral – this year on 28 September.

We have recently had two of our three lay ministry wardens step down after years of good service. Thanks again to **David Kirby** and **Melvyn Pereira**. Now we are doing things differently, I have changed the shape of the warden ministry. **John Hall**, Rector of the Nene Crossings Benefice based round Irthlingborough, who has been Warden of Readers, now becomes Warden of Lay Ministers for the Oakham Archdeaconry, and **Ben Lewis**, Vicar of St Mark's Wellingborough, becomes Warden of Lay Ministers for the Northampton Archdeaconry. I am very grateful to both of them for agreeing to take on these new roles. They will be looking after all the lay ministers in their patch, including Readers, and will have specific responsibility for ensuring that working agreements, and incumbent and lay minister relationships, are as they should be. Discernment and selection for training are now a matter for **Andrew Coleby**, who runs lay ministry training, **Jenny Opperman** as lay vocations officer, and the relevant incumbent, under my oversight.

There will doubtless be questions around all this, and further developments to come. Please feel free to come back to me at any stage, but also expect to hear more from your new Warden of Lay Ministry.

### **Parish Nursing**

There is a growing number of parish nurses in the Diocese, and we want to offer support for this valuable ministry as we do for other lay ministries. As a starting point it would be good to identify where parish nurses are exercising a ministry, so we can find out what support they might like or need. I have asked Deborah Marsh, formerly a parish nurse and now a team vicar in the Oakham Team, to co-ordinate this work. Please, if you have a parish nurse working in your parish, contact the Deborah on 07919 385314 or [debmarsh37@yahoo.com](mailto:debmarsh37@yahoo.com).

### **Transgender Affirmation**

I have been working on some thoughts about what has become a controversial subject for many, but these have expanded into the length of a normal letter, so I will be sending a single-theme supplement to this letter in a few days' time.

With much gratitude for our fellowship together in ministry,  
and with every blessing for Holy week and Easter.



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