

BISHOP'S LETTER No 27 11 October 2019

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

Autumn greetings to you. It is good to be in touch.

Pilgrimage – 13 October

I am taking a group of 50 people to Israel and Palestine this Sunday, 13 October, for 8 days. We'd be grateful for your prayers.

Ministers' Conference 2020

You may well have your 2020 diary by now. If so, please make sure that our next residential ministers' conference is in it. We shall again be at the Yarnfield Park conference centre in Staffordshire, from Monday 9 November to Thursday 12 November 2020. As usual, stipendiary clergy are expected to attend. Other licensed clergy and lay ministers are warmly invited. I hope to see you there, in just over a year's time.

Admission of Children to Communion before Confirmation

This is a practice which I warmly recommend, having seen excellent fruit from it in a number of parishes. Canon Pete White, our Director of Children and Youth, has helpful information and materials for parishes considering this. As a diocese, we are meant to keep a list of parishes which use this provision, and to ensure that suitable preparation and follow-up are in place. Unfortunately, our records are far from complete, and we need your help.

It would be very helpful if you could all be in touch with Pete to let him know either:

- if your parish admits children to communion before confirmation; or
- if you might be interested in doing so; or
- if this is something you and your parish are not interested in at this time.

Please be in touch with Pete as soon as possible on peter.white@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Announcements

Most weeks my office announces clergy moves, appointments, or retirements. We send these announcements to those who need to know, including Crockfords and Church Times. Recently we have been asked to send them to all clergy. As an experiment, we have now started doing that, and would be grateful for any comments for or against that policy.

Bishop's PA

Alex Tolley, my PA, is expecting her second baby, due in early March. I am delighted for Alex and Craig, but have to make arrangements for her maternity leave. Later this month we will be advertising for a maternity-cover PA, full-time, based at my office, probably starting in late January. If you know of anyone who might be right for this, please encourage them to get in touch.

Clergy Care

In a number of dioceses, bishops have started instructing clergy to take two consecutive days off once a month, as well as a full day off in the other weeks. This is in addition to the normal annual leave allowance. I have been asked if I intend to do the same. My answer may seem a strange one, and I'm very happy to discuss or explain it, but it represents a firmly held position.

I have no intention of telling clergy how many days off to take, or how to configure their days off or their annual leave. To do so would make me a manager, and would make the clergy employees. (I am referring to parish clergy; chaplains and some diocesan staff are employees and come under different arrangements.) During my 26 years in parish ministry, and now 17 as archdeacon or bishop, I have rejoiced in the freedom we have to organise our own lives: to have lunch at home sometimes, to share in children's bedtime or the school run or see children in a school play during the daytime, to go out for a walk or to the cinema or read a novel on a "working" day when I feel the need to do that. I have never counted my working hours in a week, or even my days of leave per year, and I have never felt the need to do so. I know that I work hard at my ministerial calling. I am a priest and bishop 24/7, and I am also a husband, father, brother, friend - and a person with my own needs - in the same way. (I tried to be a 24/7 son too, when my parents were still alive). I rejoice in holding these duties, joys, responsibilities and privileges together. I delight in our strange and somewhat unusual status, as neither employed nor self-employed, but "office holders". I am perplexed and a little saddened when parish clergy want to be employed and line managed, or see their calling as in some way analogous to a job. To the parish clergy I would say, Give yourself wholly and joyfully to the various callings, responsibilities and privileges the Lord has laid on you; Look after yourself as well as others, taking the time you need for refreshment, recreation, and rest; Work hard, pray hard, love well, care for those in your charge including yourself.

Fasting

From time to time on my travels round the diocese, I mention fasting, which Our Lord puts alongside giving and prayer as an essential aspect of discipleship. I am regularly met by questions or looks of surprise. I am thinking of writing about fasting in a future letter, but, before doing that, I would like to hear from any who teach or encourage fasting in their parishes. Please get in touch if you'd like to share with me what you teach or suggest in this regard.

Gypsies, Travellers and Roma People

General Synod has recently discussed ministry to what is sometimes called the GTR Community. Dioceses are encouraged to appoint a chaplain to know, minister to, and advocate for these people. If anyone might be interested in that ministry, probably on a one-day-a-week voluntary basis, I'd be very happy to hear.

Lay Ministers

It was wonderful to spend a Saturday with many of our lay ministers at the end of September, as we worshipped together, shared food, fellowship, and teaching; and welcomed those starting out as licensed lay ministers. I want to clarify again for those who missed it, that this day, celebrating lay ministry, is now an annual fixture for all licensed lay ministers. It is not just the occasion where new lay ministers are licensed; it is an integral part of the lifelong learning which we expect of our lay ministers (as we do of our clergy). When it comes to the five-yearly relicensing of lay ministers, participation in this day each year is one of the main signs we will be looking for that people take their ongoing training seriously. I look forward to seeing even more of you next year, on a yet-to-be-announced Saturday in September.

With greetings, and thanks for our fellowship and shared ministry.

+ Donald

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