



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

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Dear friends,

As I write, I'm conscious that we are well into the season of lent, a time for self-examination, abstinence and repentance, and of stepping into the wilderness with Jesus to prepare our hearts and minds for the events of Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Sunday beyond. Lent is a season for ruminating on and demonstrating a commitment to the values that are central to our faith, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6. 21).

As you may be aware, each year I'm keen to disrupt the regular patterns of work during Lent – for me, this has become a discipline of sorts. This year I have embarked on a pilgrimage which is taking me along the Art Trail in the Barking Episcopal Area. [You can read more about the Pilgrimage by clicking here.](#) I am enjoying walking between all 27 churches, pausing to reflect on the art work and pray. There is also always the opportunity to meet with people and learn a little more about the life of the diocese. I'm grateful to those who have provided welcome in the churches we have visited, and those who have joined as pilgrims.

Iran and the Middle East

The matters that preoccupy us in our churches and daily lives always take place against a backdrop of wider world affairs. At present we cannot but be aware of events taking place in the Middle East following the attack on Iran by the United States of America and Israel last week. It is not at all clear what the outcome or consequences of this action will be. Many are hoping and praying for a change of regime in Iran and for freedom and justice for the people who have been so brutalised over the last four decades. But this is far from certain, and in the meantime, as we watch and wait in horror, innocent people are dying and there is fear all across the region. In Iran itself, of course. But elsewhere too, including in Israel and among Palestinians in the West Bank who continue to suffer the atrocities of illegal settlers while the eyes of the world are turned towards the epicentre of the conflict.

If you have not already seen it, I commend the letter published by ++Hosam of Jerusalem on Saturday which expresses so poignantly much of what I would want to echo. [++Hosam's letter can be read by clicking here.](#) Please join me in praying for Christians, Jews and Muslims and all people across the Middle East, remembering especially our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Iran. You may wish to use the following prayer. [There are other prayer resources available on the Church of England website by clicking here.](#)



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*Ever-loving God,
who hears us in our anguish and distress,
and longs for us to be free.
We pray for the people of Iran and the wider Middle East,
at this time of fear and uncertainty.
Be near to those who are anxious;
bring comfort to all who are suffering.
Guide those with the power to make decisions,
and lead them in the ways of wisdom, compassion and moderation:
that people of goodwill would seek harmony and reconciliation.
Join us with our Christian brothers and sisters in all places,
in praying for peace with justice,
through him who is the prince of peace,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

100 Days of Prayer

Within the Diocese, I hope it has not escaped your notice that on Ash Wednesday we began 100 Days of Prayer as part of [the whole Sustaining Ministry journey](#). Following these intentional days of prayer which will take us through to 29th May, there will be a period of *reflection*, before we embark on 100 Days of *listening* through a diocesan wide *conversation* in the Autumn about how best to sustain ministry going forward. We know there are difficult decisions to make, we know there are challenges ahead; we also know that God is faithful and will guide us into the future. In order to discern what that means for us – how we might need to change, what choices we may have to make – we must prepare well by attending to the voice of God; and there is no better way to do that than through the discipline of prayer – individual prayer and corporate prayer.

We know that prayer changes hearts and minds and that it makes possible those things which may seem impossible. But talking about prayer isn't sufficient. Rather, we must practice and participate. And in the spirit of Travelling Well Together and our shared diocesan values, we need as many people as possible to be involved. So I want to urge you to take part in the invitation to 100 Days of Prayer and to be part of a wave of prayer in which we open ourselves up to what God might be saying to us about the next phase of our life together. If you're at a loss to know how to get involved there are some resources on the website that will help you. Do please take a look and be part of shaping the direction of travel. [To find out more, please click here.](#)

PTO pathway safeguarding training

Going forward, some PTO clergy will be eligible for a condensed pathway for their safeguarding training. A form has been devised that will help distinguish those who are at a stage in life where, for whatever reason, they are offering much less ministry. Those who fall into this category, with the agreement and support of their Area Bishop, will be able to opt for the nationally approved condensed PTO pathway when they are next due to update their training. Please speak to your



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Designated Responsible Person to find out more. However, please can I ask you to manage your expectations in two regards. First, I expect it will be a very small number of people that this will affect and, secondly, the training, although somewhat truncated and taking a little less time to complete, is not vastly different, and still includes some course work. Nonetheless, I hope it will prove helpful for some.

Renewal of DBS checks, licenses and safeguarding training

Can I gently remind all those who hold a Bishop's Licence or any role that requires a DBS check and/or safeguarding training that it is your responsibility to keep a record of when these are up for renewal. We do have processes in place designed to help with this and we aim to contact you with enough advance warning so that you can arrange for the necessary renewal or update. However, ultimately, it is the responsibility of each one of us to know the expiry date on these documents and to take appropriate and timely action to ensure that they are all up to date.

Bishop's Study Day

If you were not able to be present for the Bishop's Study Day or would like to hear the sessions again or share them with others, [a recording of the talks by Revd Canon Dr Michael Leyden is available here](#). The subject of the day was our second diocesan value: *Valuing the small, the marginal and the vulnerable*, and I was grateful to Michael Leyden for providing a helpful, fresh and thought provoking perspective on this important area of our shared life. I know that many who attended felt affirmed and encouraged.

Finally, can I wish you all a continued holy and blessed Lent, and can I remind us all that even in this season of repentance, when there is so much all around that challenges and risks undermining our shared life, we are anchored in God's love and the hope we have in Christ Jesus:

Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you. (Psalm 33. 20-22)

With my thanks for our shared ministry and wishing you every blessing.

Yours,

+ Guli Chelmsford

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