



22nd July 2026

Dear friends,

As I prepare for my summer break and a few days away, I wanted to write to thank you once again for all you do to serve your local community and contribute to the missional life of our Diocese. I know that many have worked tirelessly and that there is much to celebrate in our churches, schools and chaplaincies. There are challenges too of course, but I encourage you to keep looking for the good and noticing the blessings; and please know that I am profoundly grateful for your faithful ministry.

Early indications from the Statistics for Mission, which will be published in the autumn, suggest that most of our stats in Chelmsford are higher than the national average this year, showing either greater growth or smaller decline. As most of you will know, I'm less interested in the precise size of our churches and much keener to emphasise the importance of healthy, flourishing and outward looking worshipping communities. However, where we do see signs of growth and more people coming to faith or eager to explore, then we should indeed rejoice. And we should be reminded of the importance of being ready to receive newcomers; of being welcoming spaces which offer people the opportunity to encounter the risen Lord Jesus, grow deeper in faith and find a place of belonging. I hear many good news stories and see signs of hope around the Diocese, including from those places that may not have seen a growth in numbers. Some of these good news stories are shared in The View each week so do look out for them and be encouraged by them.

Safeguarding

I want to give you a heads up that as from the Autumn and spilling over into next year, I will be doing a series of **visits to each of the six archdeaconries** across Essex and East London. The purpose of these is to have a wider conversation about the culture of safeguarding in the Diocese. I hope to hear from you and reflect with you about what we are learning and how we can continue working together to ensure that our churches are safe places for everyone. I will be joined at each of the meetings by our Director of Safeguarding, Amanda Knight, and the relevant Area Bishop and Archdeacon. Clergy, LLMs, PSOs and Church Wardens from each archdeaconry are invited and I very much hope that you will prioritise these meetings. If you are in one of those categories, do please make a



note of the date that applies to you; all sessions will be from 7.30 – 9.00 pm. Further details regarding venue will follow nearer the time.

Monday 9 th November 2026	–	Chelmsford Archdeaconry
Tuesday 1 st December 2026	–	Stansted Archdeaconry
Wednesday 9 th December 2026	–	Southend Archdeaconry
Thursday 21 st January 2027	–	West Ham Archdeaconry
Thursday 4 th March 2027	–	Colchester Archdeaconry
Thursday 15 th April 2027	–	Barking Archdeaconry

You may well be aware that next February, the whole Diocese will be **audited by the INEQE Safeguarding group** as part of their ongoing audit programme for the Church of England. I hope this will be a positive opportunity for us to demonstrate the progress we have made in our safeguarding practice, and to showcase how much we are doing to ensure that safeguarding is an important priority for us. The audit will also be helpful in identifying any areas for further improvement. As we all begin to make preparations, it might be helpful to have a reminder of some important good practice in this area, including the following, that:

- Safeguarding is a standing item on PCC and other significant meeting agendas.
- Safeguarding contact posters are displayed in entrance hallways.
- Contact details for safeguarding officers are available on the front page of all websites.
- Safer recruitment practices are being followed for all appointments, both voluntary and paid.
- Parishes are using the safeguarding dashboard.

Please do look out for and complete the surveys that the Diocesan Safeguarding Team will be issuing in the Autumn, which will help us in our preparations for the audit.

General Synod

You will probably be aware that the General Synod of the Church of England met in York recently, between 10th – 14th July. This group of sessions saw the end of the quinquennium and so I want to take the opportunity to thank those clergy and lay members who have represented Chelmsford Diocese over the past five years. Participating in General Synod takes a huge amount of time and energy and we have been served very well by our 15 reps who have engaged in all kinds of different ways, including through thoughtful contributions during debates and involvement in various groups and committees. Preparations are now under way for elections for the next quinquennium which will begin in November.



You can hear more about the most recent group of sessions from your deanery General Synod reps but I want to mention briefly two debates, one a Diocesan Synod Motion (DSM) brought by the Diocese of Carlisle on Palestine, and the other a Private Members Motion (PMM) on Same-sex relationships and compatibility with Christian discipleship. Amendments were passed on both these motions and the final vote in each was taken by houses which means that results will be made public in due course. So I'm happy to share with you that in both cases I voted in favour of the amended motion.

In the case of the Palestine DSM, the motion was carried overwhelmingly in all three Houses. There is no place, ever, for antisemitism and I'm wholeheartedly committed to developing strong relationships with Jewish friends, and will continue investing time in doing so. At the same time, I want to continue listening to the cry of Palestinians, including Christians, whose future existence is under threat and whose dignity and human rights are daily violated. I will go on calling for peace and justice for all – Jews, Muslims and Christians – and am currently planning my next visit in January with the charity MOSAIC of which I am Patron.

In the case of the PMM on Same-sex relationships, to my great regret, the amended motion fell in the House of Bishops. There are, as we know, strongly held different views on these matters which I honour and respect. But this quinquennium has been especially bruising and painful for many LGBT+ friends and I am profoundly sorry that we were not able to end it with what would have been some small encouragement and affirmation. I remain committed to the process for ongoing work outlined by the House of Bishops and did not consider the PMM to be a threat to that. I want to assure all LGBT+ people in this Diocese of my ongoing prayers and support and to offer my sincere thanks for the many and diverse ways in which you make an invaluable contribution to our churches and our shared life.

In this group of sessions, Synod also authorised the celebration of **two new liturgical observances**. The Festival of Creation in Christ, assigned to the first Sunday in September each year is one of the fruits of a growing ecumenical movement across churches worldwide and offers an opportunity for Christians to give thanks for God's creation and redemption of the world, and to reflect on humanity's responsibility to care for the natural world and to pray for its renewal.

The Commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya remembers twenty-one men who were targeted specifically for their Christian identity and refused to renounce Christ despite the threat of death. They will be Commemorated in the Common Worship



The Church of England
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Calendar on 15 February and included in subsequent printings of the Calendar and Lectionary.

It is a significant and rare step for General Synod to introduce new liturgical observances and I was pleased to be able to speak in favour of their introduction at the February meeting of General Synod. In particular, I spoke about the Commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya who were killed in 2015, drawing on my own experiences and reminding Synod that martyrdom is not merely an ancient phenomenon but a modern day reality. [My speech can be watched here.](#) A document offering practical information about the celebration of the new liturgical observances [can be read here.](#) Further information about the Synod decision to introduce the Commemoration of the Twenty-One Martyrs of Libya [can be read here.](#)

Finally, I wish all of you a happy and blessed summer. I hope you will be able to enjoy some much needed rest and refreshment.

May the love of God rule in our hearts, the peace of Christ sustain and empower us, and the reconciling power of the Holy Spirit draw us towards greater unity.

With assurance of my prayers and with every blessing.

Yours,

+ Guli Chelmsford

Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani
Bishop of Chelmsford



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