



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

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Dear friends,

The autumn term is now well underway and most of us will be fully immersed in our usual routines. Some of you, of course, may have had children starting or returning to school, or young people heading off to university, or some other change in your life that you are navigating. Whatever your circumstances, I hope you encounter God's peace amidst the busyness, and time enough for refreshment. We all need to be reminded, from time to time, of the words of Jesus, as recorded by St. Matthew: *Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*

I want to begin by formally welcoming Harriet Mathews as our new CEO and Diocesan Secretary. I'm very much enjoying getting to know Harriet and am looking forward to working with her closely, as we move into a new phase of our diocesan life. She brings huge skill and experience, as well as a deep faith, and I have no doubt that she has a great deal to offer. Please do pray for her as she picks up her responsibilities.

2027: Travel and sabbatical

I have now been in post as the Bishop of Chelmsford for a little over five years. A great deal has happened in that time during which I have sought to ensure that the diocese is my absolute priority and have been away as little as possible. It continues to be a privilege for me to serve here and I'm daily grateful to God for our shared ministry. 2027 will see me travelling a little more, with working trips planned to the Middle East, America, Kenya (to visit our five link dioceses) and Australia. At the end of my time in Australia, from the middle of October 2027, I will be on sabbatical until somewhere around the middle of January 2028. As well as an opportunity to slow down a little, I hope this will give me the space to reflect on the past few years and begin to discern what God might be saying to us about the next phase. I'm grateful to Bishop Roger for agreeing to hold primary responsibility for the Diocese during my sabbatical, working closely with the other bishops and members of the Bishop's Leadership Team.

Important news about safeguarding

Hopefully you will already have seen in the View and elsewhere, that the Diocese of Chelmsford and Chelmsford Cathedral will be audited by **INEQE** at the beginning of February 2027 as part of their five-year audit programme across Church of England Dioceses and Cathedrals. Ahead of the audit, INEQE want to engage with people in church communities through a confidential and anonymous online survey. [A video explaining more about the survey is available here](#). Please note that there are different versions of the survey for different groups of people in our church communities, and I want to encourage you, firstly,





to take part yourselves, and secondly, to promote the survey in your church communities and networks. Your feedback is vital to the audit process and will help us continue to create and maintain environments where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued. [To complete the survey please click here.](#)

Can I once again 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. You need to allow around 3 months to apply for a new DBS and please be aware that in the event that your DBS expires and you do not yet have a new one you will most likely be required to step back from ministry.

I would also like to draw to the attention of those of you who have **bell ringers** in your churches, that tower captains and bell ringers are considered church officers for safeguarding purposes, and as such, you need to follow Safer Recruitment processes in their appointment. A reminder of these processes is available on the Church of England website [by clicking here.](#)

Holy Sabbatical during Lent 2027

Some of you will recall that, in 2022, I invited church communities across the Diocese to join me in a period of Holy Sabbatical during Lent. Sensing high levels of exhaustion and anxiety at that time, the Holy Sabbatical was an invitation for each of us individually, but also collectively, in our various groups, to step into a different rhythm and a different way of being - to cease from some of our busyness, cancel some of our meetings and spend time instead in prayer or shared opportunities for strengthening relationships. The Holy Sabbatical was a time to pause, take a deep breath and draw on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Bishop's Leadership Team and I devoted several days across Lent to being with one another, walking, praying, laughing and reflecting. The invitation to participate was entirely invitational. Some church communities chose to participate, others did not, and how it was experienced in different places also varied, but I know that many who took part, found it beneficial.

Five years on I'm inviting you once again to join me and the Bishop's Leadership Team in a Holy Sabbatical during Lent 2027. Like last time, this is invitational but I urge you to consider it seriously. I'm aware that there are also some costs to pausing some of the regular meetings and activities of parish life but I also believe that the benefits can be significant. Further information will be shared in due course but I wanted to provide adequate notice for those who might wish to participate. For myself, I have already set aside days in Lent, both for my walking pilgrimage and for time to be with the Bishop's Leadership Team outside of regular meetings in which we will enjoy one another's company and seek to hear more clearly the whisper of the Holy Spirit.





Sustaining Ministry 100 Days of Listening

Travelling Well Together has helped us move beyond a top down approach and towards prayerful, local discernment and participative change; praying, listening, and working together with those who are most involved and affected locally. The period we are currently in - Sustaining Ministry 100 Days of Listening - builds on the time we spent earlier this year during the 100 Days of Prayer, as we seek to discern what God is calling us to in our local communities and how this can best be supported through our shared resources as a diocese. If you have not yet had the opportunity to explore Sustaining Ministry 100 Days of Listening (and the 100 Days of Prayer), please do consider doing so now. [You can find out more by clicking here](#), and it isn't too late to join in. I very much hope you will take seriously the invitation to enable a time of prayerful discernment in your parish community that will help inform our shared life.

Retired Clergy

I'm immensely thankful for the many ways in which retired clergy serve the life of parishes and the wider diocese, as they continue to live out their life of vocation and discipleship. Can I remind those who are retired that, as a diocese, we offer to pay the fee for Life Membership of the Retired Clergy Association (RCA). Please do contact your Area Retired Clergy Officer for more information. It was a joy for me, recently, to address the first national consultation of Diocesan Retirement Officers organised by the RCA. If you would like to read the address it is available [by clicking here](#). As a diocese we are exploring ways in which we can support retired clergy to flourish in their continuing vocations. So it was good to gather at our recent Bishop's Study Day for Retired Clergy on 7th September and share learning and experience together. Another such day is being planned for October 2027.

Lay Ministry

In acknowledgement of the hugely valuable contribution that a variety of lay ministries play in the life of our diocese, and in anticipation of the need for more flexibility in patterns of ministry in the future, the Church of England has recently issued an updated **National Guidance for Reader and LLM (Reader) Ministry**. One outcome from this is the removal of the PTO category for Licensed Lay Ministers at age 70. This means we are working towards all LLMs either holding my licence or being retired from ministry. We will be contacting all LLMs and their incumbents who are in the current PTO category to ask if they would like either to lay down their ministry or be relicensed to their parish or benefice. We will hold some celebratory gatherings to acknowledge this.

In order further to champion the role that our LLMs play we are forming a '**Council of Readers**' for the Diocese. This is Chaired by Caroline Harding our Warden of Readers, with each Area Warden of Readers and a deputy representing the breath of our diocesan life and contexts. I will be taking an interest in the work of this group as it develops.



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A **National Lay Ministry Register** will be going live from January 2027. This will hold the name of all Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) and the parish or benefice to which they are licensed and will be held alongside the existing national Register of Clergy. I'm grateful to Bishop Adam for his continued leadership along with Caroline Harding and others in developing the important area of lay ministry. Further news and updates about the wide range of lay ministries will be shared in the coming months.

Please be assured of my continued prayers and for my deep sense of gratitude to God for all that you do.

Yours,

+ Guli

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