



The Bishop of Chichester
The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner

To all Licenced Clergy, Clergy with PTO, and Churchwardens

4th August

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

1. Going on a happy holiday...

In some ways I feel that you should not be reading this right now: you should be on holiday and – hopefully – looking at it when you return!

The demands of the long period of lockdown have sapped our energies, spiritual, emotional, and physical, in ways that we do not perhaps fully understand. So having the best holiday you can manage this summer is a real priority. I hope you will enjoy or have enjoyed, yours. I am looking forward to mine!

Some clergy have enquired about carrying over holiday entitlement from one year to the next. We do not generally do that, but it is significant that the question has been asked this year when taking holiday has been so much more complicated.

Being disciplined about holiday entitlement is not easy when the working context of ordained ministry in a parish is itself so difficult to quantify. The real danger here is that deep down there is a temptation to work longer than we should and with insufficient holiday because somehow that is evidence that we are needed.

We know that this is irrational, but a number of external factors sustain this temptation. One is the fact that we don't commute to work, so it can look as though we don't work at all. Another is that we love what we do, so it does not always look or feel like work. A third is the hidden anxiety about attendance numbers, ageing congregations, and funding. The more we hear that clergy are the greatest cost a diocese has to bear, the more we fear that others might be wondering about value for money and the measurements of "success".

It would be utterly wrong to dismiss all of the above. Parochial clergy who give up on attendance, funding, and the profile of their congregations have often already given up on the spiritual and pastoral disciplines that fuel concern about those aspects of our duty and calling. Let me be clear and honest: I meet very few such clergy in this diocese.

Overwhelmingly I and my colleagues can give examples of clergy who are doing heroic work, in the general challenges of Covid recovery and in areas of specific need. And we thank God for the privilege of serving alongside you in this household of faith.

Holiday time is a scriptural injunction, integral to the holiness code governing times and seasons (Leviticus 23), given to Moses and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Christian festivals of sabbath rest rejoice in the new creation. This should be a foretaste of eternity, characterised by delight in God's work "when the morning stars sang together and all the children of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7 JKV). Enjoy it to the full.

2. Vocation to Ordained Ministry

I have long thought that there is something amiss in the phrase, "setting God's people free". It suggests that God's people are the laity and that the clergy are somehow in charge of restricting them in any way possible.

Actually, God's people are clergy and laity together: that is the nature of the Church. It is a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to show forth the praises of God (cf 1 Peter 2:9). God himself provides for the

Church to become fully itself by investing distinctive character in its members.

In the Church of England's talk of lay ministry, it is rarely that lay people are encouraged to speak positively, and from the viewpoint of faith, about what they do outside the life of the Church. But that is where they uniquely and importantly apply the mystery of faith to the social and public dimensions of work and daily life.

It has always seemed to me that the high standards of professionalism that are rightly expected of working lay people – in trades such as plumbing and bricklaying, no less than in teaching, medicine, finance, or the voluntary sector – should rightly be expected of the clergy.

In this diocese, we see the fruits of outstanding work in discerning vocation to ordained ministry from those who demonstrate high standards of commitment and professionalism as laity. And I wish to place on record the excellent work that Keir Shreeves, our DDO, and the team of assistants undertake.

Setting high standards has attracted an increasingly diverse range of candidates. Academic attainment is a valuable measure, easily dismissed in today's culture. But it is not the only important consideration in the discernment process. The personal, human, and spiritual qualities shown by someone exploring ordination are the essential foundation of vocation to diaconal and priestly ministry.

In a recent interview with a young, academically high-achieving candidate for ordination, I asked what qualities would make for a good priest. The response was that it needs to be someone other people will naturally like: a kind person, well-adjusted, confident in the Christian faith but not conceited.

That echoed what I also hear from parish representatives who have the task of selecting a new incumbent. Theological literacy and liturgical competence

to a reasonable level are taken for granted. What the parish reps are really concerned about is the quality of social skill and its pastoral application.

As a team who have the responsibility for the apostolic life of this diocese, we are committed to ensuring that this household of faith is served by the very best people that we can find, that we will train and form in the skills of ordained ministry. And we are similarly committed to ensuring that a lifetime of priestly service will be sustained by continuing development in order to retain the vitality of faith and imagination that is expected of us.

3. “10,000 new, lay-led churches” ?

The sensationalist handling of the *Myriad* mission initiative has, I fear, missed its mark.

It is right to believe in the power of God to exceed the limits of our faith and to find new ways of replicating and expanding the Church’s life. Damage occurs when we seek to rebrand the Church in a marketing exercise that is suited only to the fashion of the age.

Setting ourselves a target that will stretch and challenge us can be a good spiritual and evangelistic discipline. But it must always be undertaken with the clear conviction that this is the work of the Holy Spirit in which we cooperate, with humility and patience as we await the outcome. Let us acknowledge our limited capacity to see the way ahead, and not seek to define the success or failure of God’s work.

In the Bible, numbers seem to have symbolic importance. For example, the number twelve and its multiples resonate with the tribes of Israel and the apostolic band. Seven is a sacred number, as is the counting of three days, and forty days or years.

But the sign of the covenant, in both its old and new manifestation, is something else. God blesses Abraham by promising descendants as many as the stars and grains of sand on the seashore (Genesis 15.5; 22.16). Jesus

promises a vision of heaven and the angels ascending and descending as signs of its connectedness with him (John 1.51). A sense of superabundance runs through the imagery of both covenants. Trying to calculate it misses the point.

St Paul gets closer when he notes that as grace extends to more and more people, the consequence is thanksgiving, to the glory of God (2 Cor 4.15). No mention of calculating quantity. Even the Apocalypse of St John, which is full of numbers, defies calculation in the numbering of angels (Rev 5.11) and elders, or of the martyr saints (Rev 7.9).

These references to the superabundance of the work of God identify its manifestation in the ordered worship of heaven that gives glory to God – the joyful duty that we owe – rather than giving space to our need for self-fulfilment.

The clergy have an indispensable role in serving the people of God in this work of giving glory to God in ordered worship. This is like the Biblical accounts of the work of the angels, and in many representations, you will often see the angels in vestments – though never the vestments of the High Priest, who is Jesus Christ.

The reference to clergy as ‘a limiting factor’ has introduced a serious flaw into the positive intention of speaking about the superabundance of the work of God and its manifestation in public worship.

Calculation belongs to the temporal processes of our life and money is its potent expression. Using money for the glory of God is one powerful way of bending our earthly processes to eternal purposes. Funding the work of priests is an expression of that.

This work is always orientated to the public square. The danger of retreat into the privacy of the domestic home is that it would mean

withdrawal from contact and accessibility for people in the greatest need in our town centres, outer estates, and small rural communities.

As a diocese, we have sought to remain committed to the Church of England's vocation to be a Christian presence in every community. Our church buildings are the evidence of this pledge. We do calculate the cost of all this and the track record of generous giving suggests that it is a cost we will continue to pay gladly, as our bounden duty to God.

4. Putting aside the exceptional provisions of lockdown.

Although many people remain fearful about coming to church, the latter part of 2021 must be a time when we dismantle the lockdown arrangements and find our way back to public worship. The exemptions from the legal requirements for public worship will need to come to an end and where good reason for any of them still exists, it would be judged by the standard provision previously used.

Similarly, the need for celebrating the eucharist in our parish churches with no congregation should no longer pertain.

It is good to be able to sing together again, though people will judge for themselves whether to wear a mask in church, and I suspect that the exchange of peace is some way off returning to what it once was – indeed if it ever does.

The Church of England continues to reflect on the theological issues surrounding the withdrawal of the chalice and giving of holy communion in one kind.

Although it is recognised that clergy will make local decisions about what is being called simultaneous communion, guidance is also expected.

Few have considered this matter in the broad sweep of Christian history, within our own tradition in England, and beyond it in the great traditions of East and West.

Frequent communion, as distinct from attendance at the celebration of the Eucharist, is a relatively modern provision. The late 17th century, non-juring bishop of Chichester, John Lake, was appalled by how rarely the holy communion was celebrated in the cathedral and required an improvement.

Leading up to the 16th century reformation in Europe the importance of the cup as an expression of Eucharistic communion grew in at least two ways. John Huss (1372 – 1415) led a protest movement in Bohemia that, among other things, demanded communion in both kinds. At the same time, Catholic devotion to the precious blood was reaching a fever pitch of intensity, tipping into superstition in some cases.

In 1383 a miracle was proclaimed in Wilsnack when some consecrated hosts were found to have survived the burning down of the church by invading neighbours. The hosts were found to be marked by the drops of Christ's blood. An annual pilgrimage still commemorates that event.

The Church of England's practice has long recognised that in the time of plague the provision of communion in one kind sits within the Christian tradition as an exception. The norm is, and must remain, receiving from the common cup – no matter that several cups might be needed. The provision of communion flagons and large communion cups, on view in the cathedral's treasury is an example of this commitment.

The danger with intinction or simultaneous communion, is that it seriously misrepresents the sign of the common cup. If it is to be adopted, it must clearly be as an exception, for a limited time only.

In the second half of the 4th century, Bishop Cyril instructed the newly baptised and confirmed Christians on how to receive holy communion, commenting on the moisture of the cup on their lips. A little later, Bishop John Chrysostom of Constantinople wrote that “the blood of the reality

smear'd on the lips of the faithful" would cause the devil (the avenging angel of Passover night) to draw back.

A recent seminar for bishops on the history of the cup, heard the details of its privatisation at a late stage of Christian history into the practice of individual cups. This unintentionally created an aura of segregation, which in the USA became an expression of racial discrimination. The common cup is, in today's clinically minded culture, a subversive symbol and liturgical sign of the universality of God's love.

In one of his hymns about the Eucharist, St Thomas Aquinas writes this about the host, the bread: "nought the precious gift divideth, breaking but the sign betideth, He himself the same abideth, nothing of his fullness spent."

At every Eucharist the bread must be broken, even if only in the symbolic form of a single wafer-bread. The Book of Common Prayer is insistent on this. That is the sign. Similarly, the giving of a common cup to each communicant is, throughout Christian history, the sign that smears the saving blood on the door posts of the body and temple of the person.

This is the tradition in which the Church of England has stood hitherto.

The legal provision has been challenged and the Church of England's legal team has examined and re-examined the law and the legal position remains clear. The use of individual cups is outside the legal provision. Against the weight of the Christian tradition, and amid all the challenges of our present context, one would have to question the wisdom of calls to expend the considerable time and expense needed for putting a new ecclesiastical Measure through Parliament.

5.Awards to the Order of St Richard 2021

It will be a great privilege to be able to assemble in Chichester Cathedral for the award giving in the Order of St Richard, at Choral Evensong on **Saturday 9 October at 3.00pm.**

These awards give us an opportunity to recognise the considerable number of people across the diocese whose contribution to our apostolic life is often hidden and unstated. But it is precisely these people on whom we so often depend. The danger is that we fail to notice their work until they give it up.

By locating the giving of these awards in the public worship of the Cathedral we wish to say thank you to each and every recipient for the contribution that they make in so many different ways.

This year, I have also made the first special award for outstanding service. It is to Richard Chevis, who was for many years the bursar of The Chichester Theological College. Since then, he oversaw the administration of the Palace estate, in Chichester, on behalf of the Church Commissioners, while at the same time acting as a shrewd and determined clerk in a number of charities attached to the See of Chichester, and a committed, energetic churchwarden at Boxgrove.

His tenacity and administrative skills are still bearing fruit in new work that these charities are undertaking, within the diocese and beyond it.

We owe Richard Chevis a huge debt of gratitude, and we wish him and his wife, Sue, every happiness in retirement in Cambridgeshire.

With my thanks for our partnership in the gospel.

+Martin