

The Bishop of Blackburn
The Rt Revd Julian T Henderson

11 September 2017

To all licensed clergy

Dear Brother and Sisters in Christ

I hope you have been able to find some rest and refreshment during the summer and, as we enter the autumn period, you are ready for the good works that God has prepared for you to walk in (Ephesians 2.10).

Heather and I spent a few days with the family in Sussex, before heading off to Anglesey where we had never been before and where, among other things, we walked nearly 70 miles of the beautiful coastal path in five days. Wonderful scenery, fresh air and tired legs!

Let me share a few important matters for our prayer. Please remember Geoff and Jean who moved on August 31st to their new home in Liverpool.

The process for appointing a new Bishop of Lancaster starts with an advertisement for expressions of interest in the near future, leading hopefully to interviews in November.

The search for a new Bishop's Secretary also happens during the autumn with Sue Taylor's final day on October 20th.

The Cathedral has just advertised for a new Executive Director to work alongside the Dean and will also be considering the appointment of a new Residentiary Canon, following Ian Stockton's retirement in October.

In addition to these there's the steady flow of crucial parochial vacancies that need good appointments.

On the financial front, work on Stage 2 of our first application for significant funds from the Church Commissioners has to be finalised soon, at the same time as work on Stage 1 of our second application is put in place.

Keeping the momentum going for Vision 2026 remains so important. When we started, that focus of our Diocesan 100th anniversary was eleven years away and now it is nine years!

On an entirely different point, but equally for prayer, you may have seen that as President of the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) I sent out a letter to the Diocesan Evangelical Fellowships and various CEEC networks recently, stating that CEEC stood by the traditional teaching about marriage and same sex relationships, expressed in the House of Bishops paper GS 2055, which was debated in the February Group of Sessions.

I find myself in a position where I am now perceived to be giving a lead at a more national level than previously which was evident in the way the letter was covered in the church press.

So, the other reason for writing now is to tell you that I was invited as President of CEEC to attend and speak at a meeting of Global South Primates in Cairo in early September. I wanted you, as church leaders in the diocese, to know about this from me first.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York were aware of this invitation, which I accepted because I see it as a way of maintaining and strengthening the links between the Church of England and Anglicans in the Global South, at a time when relationships are strained and uncomfortable.

Clear and fundamental differences of conviction are held within the Communion, with some wanting to change the church's teaching about relationships while others are resisting any change in doctrine or practice.

This means that some are choosing not to attend certain meetings with colleagues; some are requesting alternative episcopal oversight; some are openly pushing the boundaries for new pastoral practice and some are dismayed at the slowness of the church to change its canons and liturgies.

These tensions are apparent across the Church at local, national and Communion level.

My primary responsibility in Christian ministry remains, as it is for all of us, to the faithfulness of the God who has revealed Himself to us in Christ and who longs for relationship with us.

But thereafter my first, firm commitment is to the Diocese of Blackburn, where I have been called to serve as Diocesan Bishop.

Drawing near to the fourth anniversary of my consecration, I can only say it has been the most rewarding and challenging privilege to be here in the North West and I remain hugely grateful for the prayerful support of so many around the diocese.

The fact that I hold particular views, something which is true of us all, but then have something of a responsibility for a wider group within the Church of England, does not mean that my relationship with the People of God, lay and ordained in the diocese, has to be affected or compromised.

I, alongside colleagues on the Bishops' Leadership Team, who similarly have focussed personal commitments outside the diocese with which not everyone will agree, will do everything I can to maintain our existing ongoing, healthy pastoral and working relationships with all in the diocese and in the wider community.

One of the tensions of episcopal ministry is the constant need to balance national responsibilities with a primary commitment to the local church, and I know you will appreciate that this is never easy; and that is before the House of Lords beckons.

I would ask for your prayers as I seek to make this balance work and offer you my firm reassurance that I am wholly committed to seeing Christians of different traditions in our Diocese flourish in mission and ministry now and in the future as we focus and work together to achieve the challenging aims of our Vision 2026.

All of which suggests that it is likely to be a busy autumn for us all and so now more than ever we need to keep in step with the Spirit and follow His leading, so that we do indeed walk in the good works which God has prepared for us to walk in.

With my thanks and prayers for your ongoing service of Christ and our partnership in the Gospel.

As ever

+ Julian