

To all clergy and lay ministers (including PTO)

Date: 11th February 2021
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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we approach the season of Lent, we are mindful that for some, the whole of this last year has felt like a prolonged Lent. The sense of loss, disruption and forced abstinence leaves us longing for a bright, new dawn. However, this Lent provides us with an opportunity both to learn more of the language of lament (expressing our loss and grief to God) and also to go deeper in our understanding of how God entered into the suffering of this world in Jesus Christ. Easter is coming and we will sing Alleluia together before too long.

Meanwhile this letter comes with our warm greetings and our thanks for your continued ministry. There are a number of events coming up during Lent and beyond and we want to give you advance notice of these in the hope that they will bring encouragement and support to you.

Firstly, the 23rd March is being marked by the national church as the one-year anniversary of the first lockdown. Resources are being produced to help local churches mark this poignant moment. Not every church will want to do this or feel able to do it, but you might want to signpost people to the Cathedral or other churches in your deanery which are providing something.

Diocesan Retreat Day

We had planned to hold three days in March as 'Bishops' Study Days' for clergy and lay ministers to engage in the *Shaped by God Together* process (the three dates were 23rd, 25th and 27th March). However, now that we are extending the process for SBGT, we feel that it would be better to have a single Diocesan Retreat Day in March when all those involved in ministry in the diocese are invited to gather (remotely) for prayer, reflection and mutual support. We have decided to hold this on the 25th March (thus avoiding the 23rd for the reason outlined above).

Therefore, we would like to warmly invite you to block out the whole day (9am to 5pm) on **25th March** from your diary (and release the other dates if you had them in your diary). We understand that this may not be possible for all lay ministers and SSM clergy, but we will record the worship and teaching parts of the day for access later. The day itself will be a mix of worship, teaching and small group discussions, but most of the time will be kept clear for personal reflection and prayer (not online!) However, please do not book anything else into

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your diary for this day – time spent offline will be for prayer and reflection, not emails or other work! We will send further details in the coming weeks.

Maundy Thursday

We hope that the Diocesan Retreat Day will be good preparation for the Maundy Thursday Renewal of Ordination Vows and Blessing of Oils. Again, this will take place online on **Thursday 1st April at 11am**. We hope that a very small number of us will gather in the Cathedral to bless the oils which can be distributed once travel restrictions are lifted. And we hope that lay ministers will also join us for this significant date in the diocesan calendar.

Diocesan Renewal of Ministry Days

Continuing the same theme, we are now in the process of planning some gatherings for late May / early June when we will consider the changing shape of ministry and how we can best support one another in these changes. Although these gatherings will form part of the *Shaped by God Together* process, their focus will not be on the particular proposals under consideration (there are other gatherings for this which have already started and will continue through to the autumn – [see the website for more details](#)), rather the focus of these ‘renewal of ministry days’ will be on how we support one another through the changes and find resources to sustain us and enable us to flourish in ministry. We have tentatively booked **Thursday 27th** and **Friday 28th May** (each person to come to one day only), and **the evenings of Monday 7th and Thursday 10th June** (primarily for lay ministers and SSM / PTO clergy - each person to come to both evenings). Again, we will be in touch nearer the time with more details.

Bishop Guli’s Leaving Service

We can also now confirm that Bishop’s Guli leaving service will take place on **Sunday 25th April at 3pm**. She will be working in the diocese up to Easter Day and will then have a break before the leaving service and the start of her new ministry in Chelmsford. Very sadly, we are having to work on the assumption that her leaving service will be online rather than in person, but Bishop Martyn has assured Bishop Guli that when large gatherings are possible again, we will invite her back to say thank-you in person.

Age UK

On a very different note, Bishop Martyn met recently with the Chief Executive of Age UK and promised to pass on details of their services. Although there are many other charities doing excellent work at this time for all age groups, and indeed many churches who are already providing similar services, it makes sense to work in partnership wherever possible. Age UK have found their services are now being used by many younger people – indeed the increase in the take up of their services is quite alarming, particularly some of the stories of mental health concerns, domestic abuse and self-harm.

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In summary, they provide:

- a 7 day per week helpline aimed at supporting people struggling with COVID related issues. The phone number is 0116 299 2239 and is operational from 9am – 5pm Mondays – Fridays and 10am – 4pm on weekends;
- an emergency response service whereby essentials are provided free of charge;
- transport to assist in getting people to hospital and doctor's appointments;
- four sessions of domestic support within the home, free of charge, to assist those people who may be at risk of going into hospital due to underlying health conditions, and those being discharged from hospital. This could include personal care, meal preparation, cleaning of the house, and shopping trips;
- a Befriending Service which takes the form of regular telephone calls to check people are okay, whether they need any practical support and basically to have a chat and be a friend. Julia Day, the coordinator for the service, is contactable on 0116 223 7364. They are desperate for more volunteers to help with this service;
- for those who are very frail, and perhaps have mental health issues, there is the opportunity of attending one of Age UK's day centres. Further details on this service can be obtained by calling 0116 222 0558.

We hope you will make use of these services and signpost others to them.

Finally, you will be aware that the Church of England has been heavily criticised in some recent press articles. We know that this is demoralising for those who are working so hard in difficult circumstances. From our perspective, we hear so many stories of individuals and churches giving huge amounts of time and effort to supporting their communities, caring for the sick and dying, comforting the bereaved and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. This is unglamorous work which is often overlooked and undervalued. Yet it is God who has called us to this work, and it is God who will give us the strength to persevere, even in the face of criticism, and even when we ourselves wonder if we are doing anything of value. So, we hope that you will draw your strength from God, and we pray that you will know God's encouragement.

With warm greetings in Christ,



The Rt Revd Martyn Snow
Bishop of Leicester



The Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani
Bishop of Loughborough

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