The Bishop of Norwich
The Rt Revd Graham Usher

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Norwich

3rd November 2025

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Following recent concerns about people who have preached and/or presided without a licence or permission to officiate, I thought it would be helpful to remind all licensed clergy of our responsibilities when inviting

(i) lay people to preach

(ii) clergy to preach, preside or robe.

I would be very grateful if you could please read the following policy notes carefully. They also appears on the diocesan website Guidance and Policies for Clergy - Diocese of Norwich and Policies - Diocese of Norwich.

Urgent action needed: Those incumbents/rural deans who rota clergy with permission to officiate, or know that they minister in other ways, are asked to check that their names appear on the Clergy Register https://www.churchofengland.org/about/national-register-clergy and urgently let Brenna Wells in my office know if any are not listed as they might be ministering without a current PtO.

Lay people preaching in the Diocese of Norwich.

Preaching the Gospel is a delight and privilege. It is a key part of the church's mission and ministry. It is an important and responsible task, requiring a depth of Christian experience and understanding.

Much like an iceberg, the 1/9th that we "see or hear" must have another 8/9th of "experience, understanding, knowledge and insight" under the surface. That is why the canons of the Church of England require that a lay person should have the permission of the Bishop to preach, as well as the invitation of the local minister, and why the Bishop requires preachers to have theological training.

Who may be invited to preach in the Diocese of Norwich?

1. Those with the Bishop's licence or permission to officiate as lay ministers in the Diocese of Norwich

Preaching is at the invitation of the incumbent (or rural dean during a vacancy, with whom churchwardens or others preparing rotas should liaise).

2. Licensed lay ministers and those with permission to officiate from other dioceses

If a visiting preacher is licensed to preach in another diocese, s/he may preach in this diocese on an occasional basis providing that they have an up-to-date DBS and safeguarding training.

3. Other occasions where lay people can be invited to preach

The following occasions are covered by a general authorisation of the Bishop in accordance with Canon B18 noting that the incumbent (or the rural dean during a vacancy) must issue the invitation having sought the permission of the Bishop. In the case of the archdeaconries of Norfolk and Lynn, permission should be sought from the bishops of Thetford and Lynn respectively.

i. Authorised Worship Assistants

Authorised Worship Assistants from this diocese may give a talk on a regular basis, having received appropriate training, support and authorisation.

ii. One-off specialist speakers

A representative of an organisation supported by the parish (e.g. a mission agency or charity) may be invited by the incumbent to speak about their work on a single occasion; an author might come and speak about their latest book.

iii. Those discerning vocations

A member of the congregation, or a person undertaking a parish placement, who is exploring a vocation to authorised ministry may preach occasionally as part of the discernment process, although this needs to be under the careful supervision of the incumbent who must give support and feedback.

iv. Those giving particular interest or seasonal talks

A member of the congregation may speak in public worship because of their particular experience or knowledge, e.g. how their faith affects their work as a prison officer, or what it is like to be a Franciscan tertiary.

v. Speakers at all-age worship

Youth, children's and family leaders/ministers/workers are often expected to speak at services involving children and young people as part of their ministry. Such acts of worship may be at the heart of a local church's mission to its community and are, therefore, very important opportunities for communicating the gospel. When these people are licensed, this falls within the terms of their licence. Where they are not licensed, the incumbent must give appropriate support and supervision, and if this is to be a regular ministry, then there is an expectation that they are trained and authorised as an Authorised Worship Assistant.

Inviting clergy to preach, preside or robe at a service.

Invited clergy must be on the National Clergy Register to preach, preside, concelebrate or robe at services in the Diocese of Norwich. It is the responsibility of the incumbent (or rural dean during a vacancy) to check the Register https://www.churchofengland.org/about/national-register-clergy and check with the invitee that they have an up-to-date DBS and safeguarding training. If in doubt, please consult the Bishop's Chaplain.

Provided that the previous paragraph is adhered to, Church of England clergy from outside the diocese may minister "for a period of not more than seven days within three months without reference to the Bishop" (Canon C8).

The Bishop's Chaplain must be consulted about clergy of other Christian denominations being invited to preach or lead funeral services. She will liaise with their denominational safeguarding lead to check their DBS and safeguarding training. One of the local Anglican clergy/licensed lay ministers must be present at the service and offer a welcome to the congregation.

As a courtesy, the Bishop of Norwich should be consulted prior to an invitation being made to a bishop from outside the diocese to preach, preside or robe.

There are special rules about clergy from other Provinces of the Anglican Communion, both within these Isles and overseas. The Bishop's Chaplain must be consulted at the earliest opportunity so as to assess whether permission to preside/preach/robe will be possible.

With my thanks for attending to this and all good wishes.

Yours sincerely

