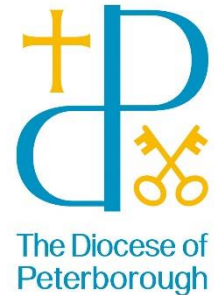


BISHOP'S LETTER No 41 23 January 2022

From Bishop Donald

To: Licensed Clergy, Licensed Lay Ministers, Clergy with PTO, Bishop's Council, Diocesan and Cathedral Staff, Diocesan Registrar, Churchwardens, Deanery and Diocesan Lay Chairs, final-year Ordinands, final-year Lay Ministry students; copied for information to Yaxley Clergy and Lay Chair



Dear friends

Warm New Year greetings to you all. This Epiphany season encourages us to rejoice in Christ being made known to all peoples, and to receive the new life and transformation that he offers. Let's encourage one another in that, before we go on to deal with practicalities, issues, and diary matters.

Having said that, I have quite a lot to share with you. Please persevere to the end of the letter, even if some sections don't seem to apply to you: others might.

Mental health

Last Monday, the third Monday of January, was "Blue Monday", dubbed "the most depressing day of the year", apparently as a stunt from around 2004 to help sell holidays. Stunt or not, the fact remains that suicide, relationship breakdown, debt levels, and other painful matters, seem particularly prominent in the days and weeks after Christmas. I certainly see this in the stress levels experienced by clergy.

We do well to think about mental health, and people's wellbeing, including our own. The state of the nation's mental health has got much worse over these two years of covid, and most of us can see evidence of that in our own context.

I remind you that we offer an assessment leading to possible counselling support for clergy and clergy families: if you want a confidential conversation please approach Canon Nicholas Gandy [by email](#). I will not be informed about your approach unless you want me to be, even though I may end up paying an anonymised bill!

We also have our Mental Health Group, still chaired by Canon Tim Alban Jones, ready to advise clergy on working with mental health issues in their congregations or communities. Do be in touch if they might be able to support you: [email Tim](#).

Canon Pastor

Mentioning Tim Alban Jones reminds me to let you all know of the slight change, or clarification, of his new full-time Cathedral role. He is now Canon Pastor and Vice Dean,

a double-barrelled title, but one that clarifies his role in the Cathedral. Some of his pastoral work will reach beyond the Cathedral, as in the previous paragraph. That is a sign of the Cathedral's role to be a resource beyond its own precincts, and I am grateful to the Dean as well as to Tim for being so ready to serve the diocese more widely.

Archdeacon Alison Booker

Alison's ministry as Archdeacon of Oakham will begin with a service in the Cathedral at 3.30pm on Sunday 6 February. Formal invitations have gone out to a few people, but everyone is very welcome to attend. It would help to have a rough idea of numbers, not least so we can be realistic in providing light refreshments afterwards. If you plan to come, please let us know [by email](#).

Covid

The lifting of most restrictions is good news, insofar as it indicates that the experts now think that we as a society can live with the disease as it is evolving. But the reminders that we still need to be cautious, alongside many people's understandable concerns, and the different state of play in other countries, all leave us in a confused situation. At various points in this letter you will spot apparently contradictory approaches and decisions. I want to acknowledge that and apologise for it, but also to say that I think it inevitable over the coming months, probably for your parish, certainly for your diocese.

The decisions about such matters as wine at Holy Communion or whether to ask worshippers to wear face coverings are for the priest in charge of the parish; though of course he or she will want to take soundings, listen to people, and probably make some compromises along the way, perhaps ending up being less than fully consistent. The same applies to my responsibilities in the diocese. Please let's be kind to one another as we struggle with some very difficult decisions. Especially, let's be kind to the most fearful and the most vulnerable: that is who we are as the church. Churchwardens and other lay leaders: please be kind to your clergy as they bear the burden of these decisions and some inevitable resultant criticism. Please, clergy, know that I will support you in the various no-win situations you are bound to face in the next stage.

Leprosy Sunday

Paralympian medallist Stef Reid has joined Pam Rhodes and myself as a vice-president of the Leprosy Mission. She is supporting the Mission's **Greater Heights** campaign to rebuild a new, improved research centre at Anandaban Hospital in Nepal. [See the video](#).

The existing lab, perched on the rooftop of the world, is home to scientific breakthroughs that will have a global impact for people affected by leprosy. The greatest height of all is in sight - ending the disease forever. But the lab was damaged in the 2015 earthquakes and won't pass the upcoming Nepali Government inspections. The future of leprosy research and the breakthroughs that could see an end to this disease are at stake.

I encourage you to hold a Leprosy Sunday at your church or chaplaincy between January and April. There are free resources available [here](#), and you can book a speaker for an in-person or online event by contacting [Daisy Mansfield](#) at The Leprosy Mission.

Bible Day / Lent Series

I am being asked regularly about Bible Days, and about whether I will be doing another video Lent series, following last year's on Hebrews. After much thought and discussion, and again with regret, I have concluded that once again we can't do face to face Bible Days this year. However, I am very happy to produce another combined Lent series and set of Bible Day talks, this year on the theme of The Four Gospels. With help from a number of people, we can also offer most of the workshops that would have taken place at Bible Days if we had held them as we hoped.

I am recording a series of six video talks:

- a 15 minute introduction to the Gospels
- a half-hour talk on each of the four Gospel books
- a 15 minute talk on the reliability of the Gospels.

For weekly Lent studies I suggest a five-week course, the first week looking at talks 1 and 6, then one week on each of the Gospel talks. As a replacement for the Bible Day, possibly on our originally planned date of Saturday 5 March, I suggest watching the six talks in order: a total of just under 2½ hours, on your own or with others, with appropriate refreshment and exercise breaks.

On 12 March we will have our live online workshop morning. I will introduce that, you will be able to join two different workshops from a wide choice, and there will be a Questions to the Bishop session at the end. You will need to book in advance, choosing your workshops.

The video talks on the Gospels will be available on our [diocesan website](#) from early February. Details of the 12 March workshop morning and how to book will be circulated soon, hopefully next weekend. Please look out for that. For any questions about the video talks, please email [Rachel Lomas](#) in my office, or for anything about the workshops, contact [Nuala Salter](#) at Bouverie Court.

Treasures from a Deep Mine

This is the title of a delightful book I have been sent. It is by the late Alison Dauntton-Fear, and edited by her son Andrew, who was Rector of Thrapston in the 1980s and is now retired and living in Bristol. The book gives us forty devotional pieces, originally given as talks in the last century including the Second World War. This is first-class devotional material, and the title is well chosen. I recommend it for private thoughtful reading, perhaps across the days of Lent. You will be encouraged, and made to think, all with a profound personal sincerity and from a deep biblical background. Available from bookshops and on Kindle.

Diocesan Synod

Please pray for our Diocesan Synod meeting on 19 March at Bishop Stopford School, Kettering. This is our first face to face meeting for a very long time, and I am hoping to include a celebration of Holy Communion with bread and wine for everyone in as familiar a format as possible. We will encourage people to test themselves for covid before they come, not to come if they test positive or are unwell, and to feel free not to receive from the common cup if they are uncomfortable doing so. I hope this will be a joyful time, and that it might be a pointer for parishes as to how they can return to (a new) normal.

Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

It is some time since I have written about the Church of England's LLF Project. Your church may have already engaged with this, or be in the middle of the course. Possibly it is something you plan to embark on shortly, or maybe you have decided that it is not right for your parishes to engage. All of the above are fine. However, I would like to remind you that the deadline for responses to the national church is 30 April this year. Responses should ideally be made via a national questionnaire. A link to this can be found on our [website](#) (scroll to the lower part of that page). Alternatively, if you prefer, you can email your responses to our LLF Advocate, [Alex Tolley](#), who will pass them onto the national team.

Whilst you are looking at the LLF page on our website, I would like to draw your attention to two recent additions. One is an 'LLF course in one day' outline, for those who feel this could be right for their churches. The other is a short video where four people, from differing perspectives and traditions, share their experiences of taking part in the LLF Course. Both can be found around half way down the webpage.

If you are yet to start leading a course you may be interested in attending one of two LLF Facilitation Training sessions which are led by the national LLF team. The course is delivered via Zoom on Wednesday 16 February, 10am-12noon and Monday 21 February, 6-8pm. Please be in touch with Alex if you feel that you would benefit from participating in this.

Alex remains available to help guide you through the LLF resources and materials and to help with any questions you have. Please be in touch with her [by email](#).

Holy Land Pilgrimage

With much regret, I have cancelled our Holy Land pilgrimage planned for the end of March. All those who booked should have had their deposits returned by now. We are re-booking for a nine-day trip beginning on 17 September, including flights from Luton, and stays in Jerusalem and Galilee. If anyone is interested, or would like further details, please contact [Joanne Gibson](#).

My apologies for the reference to the March dates in last week's Training Update. All this has been quite complicated to renegotiate with our travel firm, and I hadn't notified our Clergy Training Officer of the changes in time for the Update.

Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG)

One item in our January Training Update which I am happy to commend is the online LYCIG conference to be held in February. The details are also on our new website [here](#). Unless you are perfectly happy with the way your church is growing, you should at least have a look.

New website

Did I say "new website" just now? Indeed so. These important tools do need renewing from time to time, and the latest Peterborough Diocese website was launched last Monday. There are still a few glitches, and bits of ironing-out to do – much of that work can only take place once the site is up and "live" – but the new site is less clunky, easier to navigate, and I hope more user-friendly than its predecessor. I am very grateful to Sue Ratcliffe and her team for a great deal of work on this. Have a look [here](#), and if you have any feedback please send it to [Sue](#).

Ministers' Conference

We expect our "three-yearly" but twice-postponed conference to go ahead in November, and that most of our licensed clergy, and as many of our licensed lay ministers and lay workers as can make it, will join us at Yarnfield Park, Staffordshire, for four days from 7 November. Please have this in your diary, and watch out for further information. I would be grateful to clergy with permission to officiate if they can stand ready to cover funerals or pastoral matters during that time.

Interfaith / Ecumenical Officer(s)

Following clergy moving on, we need to fill two voluntary roles in the diocese: an Ecumenical Officer and an Interfaith Officer. I envisage each as taking up no more than one or two days a month on average. These roles could be filled by clergy, but Readers and Licensed Lay Ministers are very welcome to express interest too. Appropriate training and support will be given, but a prior involvement in the area is highly desirable. Please contact my PA, [Joanne Gibson](#), if you might be interested.

With continued heartfelt thanks for our shared ministry

+ Donald