

Lent – more of the same or a time for renewal?

Well, here we are once again on the cusp of Lent – traditionally a season of penitential preparation for the great feast of Easter; 40 days of self-discipline with the promise of a party at the end of it.

Except, of course, that this year is different. This year, we approach Lent having already been subjected to a period of almost unyielding restraint and self-denial. We have been deprived of so much that for so long we took for granted: the freedom to go wherever we wanted whenever we wanted; to enjoy unhesitatingly the company of family and friends; to shake hands, hug, be at ease with one another. As Christian people we have been permitted to “assemble and meet together” (at least after the rigours of the first lockdown were eased), but our offering of worship has been muted by the need to keep safe. We have been socially distanced, separated from one another, masked; no sharing of the peace, no common cup, no after-service fellowship or coffee (who thought we could mourn the church coffee?!) and, possibly worst of all, no singing. For all the beautiful music offered by our Cathedral choir and other musicians, Christmas without carols felt (at least to me) an especially harsh deprivation.

And it feels like such a long haul now – indeed we are fast approaching a year of life under Covid, and we are all wearied of it. Like Narnia in CS

Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, it feels as if this winter of the soul will never end.

Well, of course, like all things, this will pass. The programme of vaccinations is beginning to pick up pace and maybe by Easter, life will be that bit easier; the “thaw” will be underway, the spring will come and we may begin to breathe again.

In the story of Narnia, it is the return to life of the great Lion, Aslan, after a cruel death, that breaks the power of the White Witch and ushers in the end of Winter. CS Lewis is of course writing an allegory of the Christian story, and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So as we brace ourselves for Lent, that extraordinary hope stands before us as a guiding light. New life will come – for our Church, for our society, for our world. It may not look like the old normal – and perhaps that’s a good thing – but God’s unconquerable love is offered to us all.

So may we embrace the challenge of this coming Lent, and not see it as an unbearable continuation of what has been but a time to hope, pray and reflect on how, under God, things might be and (by his grace) shall be.

May he richly bless you this Lent.

The Very Revd Christopher Dalliston
Dean of Peterborough

Introducing Charlotte Nobbs

Our Diocesan Gen₂ team welcomed a new member at the beginning of 2021 – Charlotte Nobbs. Charlotte has been appointed Diocesan Children's Mission Enabler, and we thought we would catch up with her to say hello and discuss her new role.

Hi Charlotte – welcome to the Diocese! Please introduce yourself...

I am Charlotte Nobbs, married to Charlie, with four adult children. We have recently moved to Earls Barton, having lived in Northampton for 20 years. As a teenager I led younger children and have never stopped, starting as a house captain at school, a Sunday school teacher, running a youth group and, after studying for a theology degree, training as a primary school teacher. My own children brought new contacts with families and opportunities for fresh expressions of church, including Messy Church, assemblies, puppet shows, gardening with children, parenting support groups, growing new leaders and new teams.

My husband is a vicar, so our family life was shaped by life in the vicarage, and I feel very privileged to have been given this view. It means that I have a certain admiration and compassion for clergy and for all they are called to do. I chose to work voluntarily alongside him and the church teams we were involved with,



focusing on intergenerational church and reaching out to children and families who had no connection with formal church.

In the spare time, I enjoy theology, writing, pottering in the garden and sharing food with friends. I also love to run – and I am a raving extrovert!

You have been appointed as Diocesan Children's Mission Enabler – can you tell us about what the role entails?

I am working to enable churches throughout our diocese to find ways to bring good news to children and their families through connections

with school, home and fresh ways of doing church. I am here to encourage and develop good practice, new initiatives and to support clergy, children's workers and those who volunteer through their church across our diocese.

Is it nice to have finally started?

I am delighted to have started. It is a dream job to be part of such a fabulous team to bring good news to our children in this diocese.

Is it a role where 'no two days are the same'?

I have been in post since the start of the year, so I am still finding my feet. So far, I have been working from home, with a few one-to-one

walks, but mainly meeting people through Zoom and on the phone. A fun morning was filming an assembly on 'Building a Peace Den', with my cat making a star appearance! Never a dull moment!

How will your role sit within the team?

I am part of the Gen₂ team, and as well as having a lead on advising on children's ministry, I will have some shared responsibility for youth ministry. Much of my work will be to train others through the Children's Ministry Certificate, and to promote the vision of Growing Faith – a wonderful vision of interconnection between church, home and school.



What was your background prior to joining the diocese?

I have been a children's practitioner all my adult life, whether volunteering, being a mum or professionally. My degree is in theology and I worked as a primary school teacher. We moved from Durham in 2000 for my husband's first curacy at St Giles Northampton. We moved on to plant a church in Grange Park, connecting with community families and their children from babies through to top-end primary. I have been teaching RE to primary children, volunteering in the diocese to facilitate the Children's Ministry Certificate, and teaching on various mission enabling modules. I have a passion for the Church to connect with families and children who do not attend formal church on Sundays, and to help them grow in the Christian faith together.

What are your immediate aims in the role? It must be difficult to start during lockdown.

It is very strange to start a job working from home, and away from the team. Even so, I am loving it

already! I am meeting people, even if it is through phone calls, Zoom calls or one-to-one walks. It has been inspiring and humbling to hear about what churches are doing to connect with families in these very difficult times. I am reading various research papers, meeting with the Gen₂ team, preparing resources, gearing up to 'How do we do Easter?' and learning all the time.

What are you hoping to achieve ultimately?

I would love to enable parents to encourage faith in the family, and to see churches feel enabled to connect with families and children – not only within the church walls, but through school and partnership with other community groups. If this became a priority for churches – or at least as focused as adult ministry – then job done!

A host of useful information and resources to help you during this time can be found via www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/coronavirus/coronavirus.

Visit www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/events to find out about our online events.