



**From Bishop Donald    To the Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers**

*cc Bishop's Council, Diocesan and Cathedral Staff, Diocesan Registrar,  
Churchwardens, Diocesan and Deanery Lay Chairs,  
Yaxley Deanery Clergy and Lay Chair*

***Dear friends***

This seems a good time to write to you all, not least to thank you warmly for all you have done and are doing for our Lord, his church, and his kingdom in these strange times.

The Peterborough licensed clergy have also been receiving a bulletin from me most weeks in lockdown. There seem to be some among the laity and the retired and PTO clergy who want to see those. They are all available [here](#): that page is regularly updated as more issues appear. One day these may be collectors' items (but I doubt it).

Just a note for the licensed clergy: there is bound to be a bit of repetition in the air. Some of what is in this letter you will have heard before in recent bulletins, and some you may hear again. Apologies to those who take everything in first time around.

**Advent and Christmas Music**

I am very grateful to our Cathedral Choir, which has produced audio and video recordings of assorted Advent and Christmas carols. These are freely available to parishes for use in worship. Full details are [here](#).

**Bible Days / Lent Course / Bishop's Talks**

Inevitably, we have had to cancel the Bible Days planned for February and March next year. I am sorry about that, not least following the cancellation of the Northampton Bible Day at the very start of lockdown last spring. However, I have a cunning plan, and will publish a series of talks on the Letter to the Hebrews. These could be used for individual or small group Bible Days, or they could form a Lent Course for parishes which would value that.

A bit more detail: there will be seven half-hour talks by me, available in video or audio format, teaching through the message of this important but much-neglected New Testament book. For each, there will also be a recording of me reading the relevant passage (one, two, or even three chapters at a time) which could be a prelude to the talk if your group doesn't want to do all that reading. These could all be listened to in one day, with suitable refreshment and exercise breaks, or perhaps over two half-days. The planned date for the first Bible Day was 6 February, so your church could encourage or lay on your own Bible Day around then.

Alternatively, you could use one talk for each of the seven weeks of Lent, which starts on 17 February next year, perhaps with the reading as part of an extended Compline or Evening Prayer. You might want to listen in advance and produce your own study guide (I have produced many study guides and sets of questions for other people's material in the past, but don't really want to do so for my own talks.) Or whatever. It is, of course, up to each parish to decide whether, and how, to use this material.

I offer these talks as part of my teaching role, which I believe to be a major part of what bishops are for. They will all be available by mid-January, and we will let you know how to get hold of them by then.

Many of you, but apparently not all, will know that I also produce audio and video recordings of sermons for every Sunday and major festival, and a meditation on a Psalm every Tuesday. The Sunday sermons are available well in advance for those who want to incorporate them into worship, from [Rachel Lomas](#) in my office, and the Psalm talk appears in the rolling banner on the front page of the [diocesan website](#) by lunchtime each Tuesday. Back numbers of sermons, Psalm talks, and other material, are all available on my [YouTube channel](#), and you are welcome to use them as you wish.

## **Bishop John**

Please keep John in your prayers. You may remember that he was ill with covid for two months in the spring. He is now suffering from post-covid exhaustion, and is likely to be off work until the New Year at least. I am grateful to the archdeacons, my chaplain, and my office staff, for ensuring his work is covered and his inbox attended to.

## **Children and Young People**

Pete White, our Director of Children and Youth, has written the following, which I warmly endorse:

*It has been good to hear stories of parishes finding new ways to connect with children, young people and families; many of them have been hard hit by the virus and engaging with them has not been easy. Please pass on my thanks to all involved in this important ministry. Can I encourage you to keep younger generations at the centre of your thinking as you plan for Christmas and post-lockdown.*

*As part of the national Growing Faith Adventure, we want all parishes to consider how they work with children in schools and at home; much faith development happens there especially in our church schools. At this time, we have an opportunity to offer support to our schools and parents. Schools particularly are under a lot of pressure and if you do not have a relationship with your local school, now could be a good time to contact them and ask, 'how can we help?' The Gen2 team have put together some [Christmas resources](#) that you could offer to your school or to families to use at home.*

*The Gen2 Team are available to help with advice and resources so please do [contact them](#).*

## **Living in Love and Faith**

The long-awaited book and resource materials on sexuality, compiled by theologians and others on behalf of the House of Bishops, were published a fortnight ago. We should all take time to read, think, and engage with this material. As a diocese we will encourage and enable further discussion, so we can feed in sensibly to the General Synod debate which I guess will take place next July, and so (at the very least) we can understand each other better within the church. Watch this space.

## Vocations to Lay Ministry

Welcome to Tessa Oram, our new Lay Vocations Officer for the Oakham Archdeaconry. She is available to talk to anyone interested in lay ministry, or to speak to churches or groups. Please make use of her (or of Chris Peck, who holds the same role in the Northampton Archdeaconry). You can contact Tessa [here](#) or Chris [here](#).

## Where to next?

I know that many of you are quite exhausted as we come towards the end of this strange year, and perplexed as we try to work out how to do Christmas. So it might be a risk to put a challenge before you, however gently I try to do that. For some this might be one pressure too many, in which case you have my full permission to ignore what follows for the time being. On the other hand, for others a little challenge might be just the pick-me-up you need, so if that is you, read on.

My challenge is simply this: that we think, reflect, and discuss, around what we should be learning from this year of lockdown about healthy future patterns for our church life. Many questions suggest themselves: here are just a few.

- What has worked well in lockdown? Can we preserve those things? How?
- Why did numbers go up for the online services in the first lockdown? What does that tell us?
- Why did they not go up in the same way, and even go down, during the second lockdown?
- As we think of the things we had to leave behind temporarily, should we take them all up again? Might any of them really have been unnecessary burdens or even idols?
- In many churches “zoom coffee times” seemed to deepen fellowship. How do we follow that up?
- In many churches and benefices, one simplified and shortened service each week seemed to meet the needs of people who would normally prefer their own particular style and service time. Can we learn from that?
- Towns and cities got most of the publicity over lockdown, but what have rural parishes learned, and what can they teach the rest of us?
- What might this time be teaching us about the right patterns of community service, mission, worship, use of buildings, use of technology, ministry and staffing needs, as we move into the future?
- Has lockdown challenged the way you see your identity as a priest or minister?

And more. You get the picture. I suggest that church leaders and ministry teams should be asking this sort of question now, and encouraging PCCs to think creatively and radically in these areas over the next year or so. I'd love to hear any answers on a postcard or in an email, and I hope we can discuss these matters with courage and wisdom at deanery and diocesan synods in due time.

Thank you all so much for your share in “the priestly service of the gospel of God”.

With all good wishes for Advent, Christmas, and the New Year.

+ Donald