



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

Warm greetings to you all, as we enter our second year of covid precautions and restrictions. Some of what follows may be familiar to some of the clergy, but we have good precedent for repetition in scripture and elsewhere, so I won't apologise. It is important to me to write to this wider group from time to time, as well as sending shorter bulletins to the Peterborough licensed clergy most weeks, at least during the covid pandemic.

A particular word to the Churchwardens, Readers, and other Lay Ministers: I've been in touch with the clergy a great deal over the last year, but I don't want you to feel left out or forgotten. Those bulletins are all on our website [here](#). We have all had to change so many things we do, and the ways we do them. I am so grateful to you for your continued service during lockdown. Bless you!

This letter is in two parts: the first looking at big in some depth, and the second dealing with the more immediate material normally found in my weekly bulletins. I have toyed with which part should be first, and which second: you may read them in either order.

PART THE FIRST

(You might want to make a cuppa at this point, because this is quite long, but I do want you to take it in, and to take it seriously.)

Mixed Mode and Five Marks

Mixed Mode

So much has changed over the last year, not least in the way we do our worship, pastoral care, and mission. And, as we begin to look towards life after covid restrictions (however gradually we enter it, and however far ahead it may be), we ought to be thinking about how our life and witness might look.

I am of course very conscious of the level of weariness that we all feel. Proper breaks and holidays compromised or lost, no clarity about the coming year in that or any other respect, relationships stressed: it's been a very tough year, and reduced energy levels don't make forward planning easy. However, the next year or two are the most enormous opportunity to re-think and re-build that we are likely to see during the course of our ministries, and we must not waste it. That opportunity, and the knowledge that our energising, life-giving God is with us, should fire us on to give ourselves and lead our churches into the future.

In each of our situations we have had to do some things differently. In each we will have made some mistakes, but in each we will also have done some new, creative, and fruitful things. We have all developed new skills, and the great majority of us have seen a new and enlarged group of people looking to us and our churches in some way or other. I am hugely

impressed and grateful for many of the things I have seen and heard about in our church lives over the last year: thank you for all you have been doing.

Let's acknowledge too, that we have also, many of us, lost touch with some of our former regular or occasional worshippers. We will need to find ways of putting that right. The good shepherd goes out to find the lost and bring them back.

So, what will we do when we can get back into our church buildings in relatively normal ways? I hope nobody is saying or thinking, *Let's get back to the way we were*. That would indicate a failure to learn, a failure to see and take opportunities, a failure of nerve and of trust. Equally I hope nobody is thinking, *Let's forget the old, and press on into a new world*. (I acknowledge that to be rather unlikely in the C of E!) Instead, I hope we are all thinking, and beginning to talk, about being a new kind of mixed-mode church for the foreseeable future.

Archbishop Rowan Williams encouraged us to be mixed-mode in the sense of being both traditional and experimental, both pastoral and missional. Now we need to expand that idea, and determine to be present both in our buildings, and also online. Some of our former worshippers have moved to telephone or Facebook or Zoom or YouTube, or whatever, and won't be coming back into the church buildings. Some who had previously left us for different reasons, have now returned online, and want to stay that way. Some we have reached for the first time online: they may join us in the church building in the future, but we shouldn't bank on it. Others are dying to get back into the buildings, either for the worship they are used to and missing, or for the fellowship and proximity of people. It is up to us to mobilise our churches to seek to meet these needs as far as we can.

I have been watching many online services and meetings from across the diocese and further afield, and am now firmly of the opinion that the one thing that doesn't really work is simply to film or livestream our previously normal worship. To do that well you need lots of cameras and camera angles, really good sound quality, a very competent production team, a director who understands both worship and television, and seriously expensive IT kit. Simply livestreaming our normal Sunday services isn't what brought many newcomers to our online offerings last year.

Shorter, simpler, clearer, worship and messages is what people needed and warmed to. We can produce really good online worship material if we keep it short and straightforward: a couple of hymns or songs to listen to or maybe join in with; one Bible reading, clearly explained and applied; good prayers which don't ramble on; a warmth of personal approach; people seen head-and-shoulders rather than at a distance; minimal liturgy (responses don't work well on Zoom), but a eucharistic prayer if you wish, again filmed in relative close-up and with meaningful manual acts which work on a small screen; everything aimed at an all-age audience; informal and probably unrobed. Dumbing down? Not if it is done well. Accessible, personal and friendly: that's the idea – but still challenging and with real content.

This involves real skill, new skills for many of us. But I've seen it happening in a number of our churches with very modest resources, and it needs to become a new norm alongside our more established worship patterns. If we do this well, we can be building whole new congregations alongside our older ones. Obviously there will be work to do in getting to know people, sharing the gospel personally and one-to-one, providing pastoral care, teaching and enabling giving online, providing ideas and opportunities for practical discipleship – but isn't that what we are here for?

In the smaller churches it will not be possible to offer a full range of worship and fellowship opportunities, both gathered together and online, but I hope it will across a benefice, and certainly across a deanery in the more rural areas. Please make sure that benefice councils and deanery chapters/synods are having these discussions. I would be very open, for example, to the idea that some of our clergy and lay ministers might in future provide online

ministry on behalf of a small group of churches, while others focus on worship in and witness from the church buildings. Let's talk about this. You know your areas and parishes: it's time to think, pray, and talk, creatively about the future.

A short footnote, and a much longer one. First, some of you will have seen press reports that the Church of England is planning wholesale clergy redundancies and church closures. There may be a degree of that in some limited areas of the country with particular problems, but I assure you that in this diocese we have no such plans or intentions. We face a major new opportunity for mission in the coming years, and I have every intention that we should grasp it with all the energy and resources we can muster. That is our calling.

Five Marks

Second, we need to look hard at our priorities and perspectives. I believe that the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission offer us a good way to do this. Forgive me if you are familiar with the Five Marks, but here's a reminder, to set what I want to say into its context.

The Marks of Mission were agreed at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984, and have been modified since, with the fifth mark added in 1990, and the fourth mark expanded in 2012. They were adopted by General Synod in 1996. I believe that, properly understood, they are a very good summary of our missional task. Here is the current text:

The Five Marks of Mission:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

- 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service*
- 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*
- 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

You may remember this poster, created a few years ago, and widely used in the diocese. It is part of an excellent page on our website, well worth looking at (again) [here](#).

There are various other ways of putting the Five Marks (for example, *tell, teach, tend, transform, treasure*), but, taken together, they encourage us to see our mission as God's mission, Christ's mission, mission to the whole world, holistic mission.

I have said that we need to understand them properly. The key to this is a note on the Anglican Communion website introducing the marks, which simply says:

The first Mark of Mission, identified with personal evangelism at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984, is a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission. This should be the key statement about everything we do in mission.



What this means is that, even if we are doing Marks 3, 4, and 5 (serving the poor, seeking justice, saving the planet), we are not doing Christ's mission unless we are also doing Marks 1 and 2 (sharing the gospel, sustaining the faithful). The five together describe our mission, and without Mark 1 in particular, without intentional evangelism, we are not doing Christ's mission.

This really matters. Over the pandemic crisis many of our churches have done a great deal of Marks 2 and 3 (nurturing believers and serving the needy). Great stuff. At the same time, many people are looking hard at Mark 5 (our environmental responsibility). Really important. There is much work in the area of Mark 4 (both developing fairer trade and also resisting racism or oppression). Absolutely right. But if we aren't actively and intentionally telling people about Jesus and encouraging them to trust and follow him, even if we are doing all the other things, we aren't doing Christ's mission.

Please don't misunderstand. We ought to be serious and intentional about environmental issues. We ought to be working and campaigning for peace and justice. We ought to be finding ways of helping the poor and marginalised. We ought to be teaching and building each other up in our faith. That is all part of our mission. I commend and encourage all such actions. But if we aren't talking about Jesus, proclaiming him, commending him, naming him as Lord and Saviour, we aren't doing his mission.

Francis of Assisi is still regularly misquoted as saying that we should only use words if necessary in our preaching; in other words, that silent witness and good deeds would normally be enough. Even Francis wasn't perfect, of course, but he was never foolish enough to say such a thing as that. We can't commend Jesus, proclaim him, and name him, without using words. As Paul of Tarsus put it,

'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'
But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

Let's press on, plan and do our mission, be his people in this tough and changing world. But please remember: getting people into our buildings or to our social events may be good, but it isn't mission unless we commend Jesus personally to them. The same goes for visiting the prisoner or the sick, feeding the hungry, resisting injustice, reducing climate change: all good things to do, and all part of our mission; but none of them counts as mission unless we are intentionally, actively, verbally, commending Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

A footnote to the footnote. I have presented this in broad-brush strokes, perhaps more theoretical than practical. If you feel that it needs grounding, if you want to ask, *How do we do Easter or Pentecost online? Or How do we talk about Jesus at the foodbank?* let me remind you of our excellent mission team, still operational even if remotely so. Get in touch with [Charlie Nobbs](#), and he and the team will be able to give first class advice and training.

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PART THE SECOND

Bible Days / Lent Course / Bishop's Talks

My half-hour talks on Hebrews are now available for church or personal use. These are designed as a Lent course, but could be used to replace the cancelled Bible Days. A study guide is now ready, and I am very grateful to those who have prepared it. Please e-mail [Joanne Gibson](mailto:Joanne.Gibson@dioceseofrochester.org) if you'd like a copy, or if you have any problems with the downloads.

1. Jesus - greater than religion (ch 1-3)	Download session 1 video files
(This first session includes a brief introductory video)	Download session 1 audio files
2. Jesus - a great high priest (ch 4-5)	Download session 2 video files
	Download session 2 audio files
3. Jesus - made perfect (ch 6-7)	Download session 3 video files
	Download session 3 audio files
4. Jesus - mediator of a new covenant (ch 8-9)	Download session 4 video files
	Download session 4 audio files
5. Jesus - a finished work (ch 10)	Download session 5 video files
	Download session 5 audio files
6. Something better - by faith (ch 11)	Download session 6 video files
	Download session 6 audio files
7. Looking to Jesus (ch 12-13)	Download session 7 video files
	Download session 7 audio files
Entire Series	Download all video files
	Download all audio files

Weddings during Lockdown

Anna Spriggs, our Registrar, has had a number of questions about weddings. There is a belief among some that any wedding can proceed, provided the attendance is limited to six. The Faculty Office has issued a helpful note, which you can find [here](#). The current law allows small scale weddings, but government guidance restricts that to near-death ceremonies.

Anna and I have discussed this, and our joint strong advice is that clergy should not take marriage services except in these very rare circumstances. If in doubt, please consult either of us, but we believe that going against this advice could put clergy at risk of prosecution.

We do understand the pastoral difficulties, not least for couples who have already had a postponement, and hope and pray that it will soon be possible for the law to be relaxed.

Deepest Sympathy: Covid Deaths

I am sorry to report the death of the Revd Peter Simmons (95), who retired to Desborough in 1995 after ministry as a Church Army officer, then as a priest, in Rochester Diocese.

With love and best wishes.

+ Donald