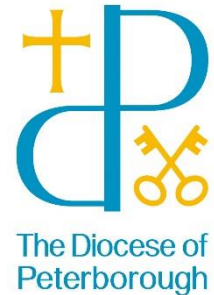


BISHOP'S LETTER No 38 7 July 2021

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 Deanery Clergy and Lay Chair



Dear friends

Summer greetings to you. My apologies to those expecting a letter on Sunday. I decided to wait until today because of the next paragraph ...

Sarah Brown

Warm congratulations to Sarah Brown on her appointment as Dean of Hereford, announced today. She has been active in this diocese over many years as a lay person and then a priest, and is currently our Canon Missioner and Adviser in Women's Ministry,

Sarah will be leaving us in the summer, and will be installed in Hereford Cathedral in the autumn. We will be sad to lose her, but rejoice that her gifts have been recognised for such a significant role.

Alison Myers

A warm welcome to Alison Myers, recently announced as the next Warden of Launde Abbey, due to take up her post in the autumn. Alison is currently Rector of the Lordsbridge Team, and Chair of the House of Clergy, in Ely Diocese. Launde is just over our border with Leicester Diocese, but we run it jointly with them, and it serves both dioceses, so Bishop Martyn and I will licence Alison together, and she will be free to minister among us.

Freedom Day (to be confirmed)

You will be aware of the Prime Minister's intention to lift almost all the legal covid restrictions on Monday 16 July. This would include distancing, face-covering, and singing. We could be back to "normal". At the same time, he is advising appropriate caution and common sense, not least in view of the current rapid increase in new cases. This may be a matter for rejoicing (insofar as it indicates the success of the vaccine programme), but it also complicates matters for churches. Some of our people will want to go back to everything as it was straightaway, while others will want to move cautiously: that difference of opinion will be just as real among the clergy as the laity.

I print here, and echo, the response to the Prime Minister's announcement by the Bishop of London, who chairs the Church of England's Recovery Group:

"I welcome the Prime Minister's presentation of the latest scientific data which underpins their decision in principle to lift most restrictions from July 19.

"The vaccination programme has been an answer to prayer but, while it has transformed the outlook of the pandemic, it has not eliminated all risk.

"So it is right, as the Prime Minister has said, that we all must exercise personal responsibility and carefully manage the risks from Covid-19.

"As Christians, called to love our neighbour as ourselves, we must also exercise collective responsibility and continue to take appropriate precautions to protect others.

"Over the past 18 months we have mourned the tens of thousands who have died from Covid-19.

"We have also all made sacrifices and seen previously unimaginable changes to our way of life as we sought to protect one another and especially those who are most vulnerable.

"In churches that has meant unprecedented restrictions on the way we practise our faith itself, affecting our ability to meet together, to sing together and to celebrate the sacraments together, all of which are at the heart of our worship.

"We have also seen particular restrictions on the way we marked major events in our lives through baptisms, weddings and funerals; sadly many were denied the basic comforts of sharing moments of joy and pain with others.

"I've been inspired by the way churches have risen to the challenge, finding new ways of gathering to worship God, reach out and serve their neighbours in these difficult times.

"I have been deeply moved by the extraordinary efforts of those working on the front line in our NHS and social care.

"And I would also like to highlight the sacrifices, often overlooked, made by children and young people to protect us all for so long during such a formative time in their lives.

"I am also mindful of those whose lives have been radically changed by the effects of long covid.

"We will await the new Government advice for places of worship and adapt our guidance to churches accordingly."

I have six points to make on this:

1. The government's final decisions concerning 19 July will not be made until next Monday, 12 July, so please don't commit yourselves with premature announcements;
2. Guidance will appear as usual on the Church of England website;
3. The final decisions in each parish will be for the incumbent and PCC (and in each chaplaincy for the appropriate managing body);
4. My previous comments on the importance of not rushing, and of ensuring that clergy and others get good breaks this summer, still apply;
5. My personal advice is to go cautiously: just because congregational singing and the shared communion cup are allowed from 19 July, and that masks and distancing are not required, doesn't mean that you have to implement all those changes on that day;
6. Personally I would be thinking of a September resumption, if the infection rate in your area makes that seem sensible.

Mental Health

The issue of mental health and wellbeing has been frequently in the news during covid. The diocesan mental health steering group has produced a very short survey which would help assess awareness of this important subject across the diocese. They and I would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete the [survey](#).

Living in Love and Faith

You will have already heard much of the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith (LLF) Project. You may feel this that is something your church might like to get involved with, or you may prefer not to engage. That is up to you. We have a page on our [website](#) which explains how your parishes can engage, should they and you wish to. I commend the many resources available to you and encourage you to look at them and consider what might be possible. Our LLF Diocesan Advocate is [Alex Tolley](#). She is available to help guide you through the LLF resources and materials and to help with any questions you have.

We had planned an introductory meeting this month for those interested in leading studies, but have had to postpone that until the autumn. That is fine as regards dates: the national church is looking for any feedback by the end of January. If you are thinking of running a group in your parish you may be interested in Penny Pullan's book [Making Workshops Work: Creative collaboration for our time](#) which is available at the significantly reduced price of 99p on 12 July only.

A Third Archdeaconry?

I am so grateful to those of you who have thought and prayed about this proposal, and let me know your thoughts. After much thought and prayer I have decided not to go ahead with it, but to stick with our current pattern of two archdeaconries. I shall therefore soon be advertising for a successor to Gordon Steele as Archdeacon of Oakham.

This hasn't been an easy decision, and there are lots of factors involved. Post-covid we are going to need to get the right balance between doing things in new ways and retaining some of the stability of known paths. On balance I think that our senior staffing structure falls mainly into that second group.

Archdeacon Gordon

Gordon's farewell in the diocese will be at Cathedral Evensong at 3.30pm on Sunday 31 October. Further announcements will be made, but I am sure that many of you will want to note the date now.

Sister Rachel

Sister Rachel will also be leaving us in October. I put on record what a wonderful friend and servant of the diocese she has been. Her setting up, training, and leading our Fellowship of

Spiritual Directors has been an outstanding gift to us. I hope to be able to announce soon who will be leading that work into the future.

My prayers, love, and best wishes for a refreshing summer.

+ Donald