

BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 10

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

5 May 2020



Dear friends

It's now just five weeks since the lockdown began; the next three-weekly review takes place over the coming days, with, we are told, an announcement of the next phase on Sunday afternoon. Interestingly, if the opinion polls are right, a majority of the population don't seem too keen on a significant relaxation of the rules. Although the present situation can be very frustrating, most people seem nervous or frightened of returning to anything like the old normal.

Business leaders, shopkeepers, and so on, want to get back to earning money, but a number of trade unions are insisting that their members shouldn't be put in danger. And, unsurprisingly, the scientists are not all agreed. What we need, and what we will doubtless get at the weekend, is a difficult political judgement, balancing a number of imponderables on each side of the scales, and probably only slow and gradual change for most of us. Do let's commit ourselves to praying for wisdom and courage for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, as they lead us.

Let's also commit ourselves as clergy to following that lead, and serving our people and our communities within the constraints that are in place. We will rightly focus on the most disadvantaged. We will continue to offer calm and non-anxious leadership.

Chaplains

Much of our emphasis in recent weeks has been on the parish clergy: they form the great majority of those holding the bishop's licence, and with the closure of church buildings, they have had to do a great deal of re-thinking and re-inventing their roles, their worshipping communities, and their service. I continue to thank and encourage all who serve faithfully in parishes.

Today, though, I want to put the emphasis on those who minister as chaplains. Whether we are thinking about acute hospitals, hospices, mental health, military, police, schools, university, workplace, or any other context: all of them have faced very significant changes in their role or their workload in recent weeks. Our chaplains deserve our thanks and support: do please pray for them, and encourage them in whatever ways you can. Chaplains: do contact me or my office if there is anything we might be able to do to support you.

Work, rest, refreshment

I am spending a lot of time each week facing a computer screen: much of it in the live interaction of skype or zoom meetings, or in recording talks and sermons. This is much more intensive and draining than the normal measured processing of emails or reading and writing papers, and the familiarity of being in the same room as other people when we are engaging with them. Many of you are in a similar place, and I know that quite a few of those who are able to, are getting out and about helping with shopping for people, foodbanks, and so on. Others of you, particularly those with a nursing or care home in the parish, are finding yourselves doing far more funerals than usual. Others still are, for various reasons, unable to produce online services, but are still seeking to enable regular prayer, Bible study, and worship for your people. We are all working in significantly different ways from what we are used to, and we know that this is going to continue for some considerable time.

All this can easily add up to a feeling of tiredness, or it can tempt us to overwork, or it can blur our normal boundaries between work and home time. I suspect that for many of us, low-level stress and/or depression may be somewhere there in the mix too: that would not be surprising or blameworthy. We all know that a calm surface, which I think is what as leaders we are called to show, can belie much effort hidden away below the waterline.

Be kind to yourself. Set the boundaries and limits you need. And let's be there for each other, be honest with each other, encourage and support one another. It is ok to be you!

Praying for the sick

Many of us have friends, parishioners, or family members who have been or are ill with covid-19. Some of us know people who have died of this dreadful scourge. As we continue to give thanks for and celebrate those who work most closely with the sick, let's also remember to pray for the sick themselves, the dying, the bereaved, those who have sat at deathbeds in lieu of loved ones. Let us share in bearing those burdens. Let us lead our people in lament as well as in thankfulness.

Some of you know that Bishop John is quite poorly at home, now well into his second week with the virus. His wife Elizabeth is in her fourth week, also at home, apparently recovering but still very tired. Please add them to your prayer list. Please don't contact them directly for the time being: my office will handle anything that would normally go John's way. I hope to give better news of his condition next week.

With love in Christ

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