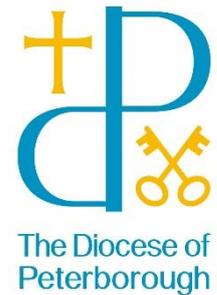


BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 12

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

18 May 2020



Dear friends

As predicted last week, the gradual relaxation of lockdown is proving untidy. It wasn't a difficult prediction. We have to feel and pray for the politicians, scientists, and civil servants who are leading the process. Please also pray for the bishops, particularly the House of Bishops, meeting weekly at present to wrestle with a number of issues; and a number of smaller groups of the House, each focussing on one area.

I'm part of the group looking at how we can, gradually and appropriately, be church and do church over the coming months. We are currently focussing on questions relating to baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmations, and ordinations: what might be possible, how, when? Each diocese will be able to make its own decisions, within government regulations, but we'd rather keep the Church of England together if at all possible.

Back to Church?

Those are important issues, and areas where we can make contact with many people, as well as renewing discipleship and ministry. The big question is just a bit further away, but it is exercising many of us: when and how can we get back to Sunday church in the church building. Much of course will depend on what the government says for the June and July stages of the relaxation – unless those stages are postponed.

The simplistic school of thought says that family life-events might be celebrated in church buildings on a small scale in June, and Sunday worship in July. I hope, and I wish; but I doubt it will be anything like that simple. I find it hard to conceive of anything like the Sunday mornings we were used to for months or years ahead. We are going to be subject to social distancing, strict limits on numbers in each building, possibly mask-wearing in church buildings, possibly bread but certainly not wine at communion, possibly a soloist or recorded music but certainly not choral or congregational singing, no touching, no coffee, no hymn books or service sheets – and all this I predict well into next year at least.

Those are the negatives, the things we may have to miss, mourn, and lament. And we will have to do that work of mourning. As clergy, we will have to prepare our people for that mourning, and lead them in it.

But there are positives too. We need to be anticipating those, preparing our people for them. We need to do this as we continue to live and lead in the present. Those of us who have been doing some sort of extended worship through modern technology, have seen our congregations grow. Those who have put effort into foodbanks, soup kitchens, care for the homeless, the shielded, the shut-ins, have seen the number of our contacts grow. Those who have innovated in worship or in community mission, have, inadvertently or otherwise, raised expectations of a different sort of church. We might have been pointing forward to a church more in tune with younger people and modern ways, more committed to its community. I have been excited to see deep conversations, warm welcome, real spiritual care, going on round the edges or on the chat channels on online worship. I am seeing really exciting coffee mornings, Bible studies, prayer meetings, offered and enjoyed online.

We mustn't lose this. We ought to be assuring those who are finding blessing in these ways, that we won't desert them when we go back into our buildings. We must also assure those whose health or other issues keep them from our buildings, including some of the clergy, that we will continue to serve them in these ways.

We are going to need a lot of hard thinking, some creative ideas, and some brave experiments. If that inspires you, go for it – and let me know how you are getting on.

And if you can't see yourself in this new world, fear not! There will always still be room for the traditional habits and skills of ministry.

With love in Christ



The Bishops' Office is closed, with staff working from home.
Phone calls to the office will be diverted, and answered by one of the team.

All email addresses below end with @peterborough-diocese.org.uk

Bishops' Office	01733 562492
Bishop Donald	bishop@
Bishop's PA	joanne.gibson@
Bishop's Chaplain	tim.albanjones@
Bishop John	bishop.brixworth@
Bishop John's PA	suzanne.carter@
Bishops' Office Secretary	rachel.lomas@