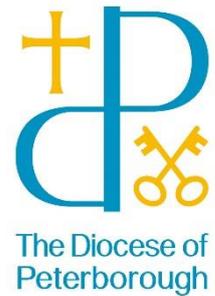


BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 6

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

8 April 2020



Dear friends

Here we are, well into a Holy Week that none of us could ever have imagined. Church buildings closed, no Communion, no foot-washing, no devotions at the cross.

And on Easter Day there will be no shared joy and laughter, no loud corporate Alleluias, no church buildings full of the white and gold of victory and relief. On Easter Day we will still be in the place of deep darkness, the place of exile, almost certainly with a daily death rate of over a thousand. In some ways it will feel that we are still in an over-extended Lent, still in the Narnian winter. It may be warming up outside, but the ice is not melting.

However, we are in this together, and together with our people, and together with our loving Lord, who is just as present in Lent as he is at Easter. Physically we will be separated from one another, as we are from the Lord, but spiritually we will be fully connected, one in Christ Jesus, united in his death and in his resurrection.

The Long Haul

This is a tough time for us, a time of great challenge for all in ordained ministry. Learning new technologies, discovering creative new ways of serving your flock and your wider community while under constraints close to house-arrest. I am so proud of our brilliant clergy, but I do realise that discovering and implementing new ways of being church can be quite exhausting. I seem to need more sleep at night than I did a month ago (and I don't think I'm ill). Ministry in this new world is very hard work.

And we are in it for the long haul. Whatever exit strategy the government devises, and tests, and then modifies, it is going to be months before we find a new, relatively stable, "normal". So we are going to have to pace ourselves for the long haul.

Many of us were planning some time away, or at least away from our duties, after Easter. I was. You might still take that time off, but it won't be the sort of break that you were planning, and it might not be the sort of break you really need. Each of us will need to work out how to look after ourselves for the long haul in this unpleasant but temporary reality.

I have decided simply to slow down after Easter, and to store the holiday time up until I can take it properly – carried forward into next year if necessary. To take at least two days off each week instead of one, to read and relax and chat more during the “working” day. I will still produce a bulletin and a video each week. I will still phone those who are ill, and support the clergy as well as I can in our distanced world. But I won’t work at a pace which is only sustainable when I can see the next holiday on the horizon. Personally, I won’t go “on holiday” until we can get back in our church buildings, and travel freely to see families and friends, but I will aim to work sustainably until then.

That is one approach. It isn’t the only one. Each of us needs to find our own way of dealing with this. Do what works for you. You have my full permission (if you need it!) to find the patterns that will sustain you over the coming months. By all means discuss this, pray and think it through, tell me what you are doing if you want to, and know that you have my support.

Furlough

You may have seen reports of clergy being furloughed in this present situation. You may have heard calls from (a very few) laity that their clergy should be furloughed, to save on parish share. Personally, I think that is a dreadful idea; but, more to the point, I am pretty sure that it isn’t legally possible for parish clergy. Our “employment” status as office-holders is not included in any of the schemes the government has introduced. It may be possible in other denominations, where clergy are legally employed or self-employed, but, unless more new rules are brought in, it simply is not an available option for us. I will let you know if that changes.

Communications

As I wrote above, during these strange times I intend to continue with these weekly bulletins, which will usually come out midweek via an email and be on the diocesan website. Towards the end of the week, and certainly by Friday lunchtime, I will also put out a video message, available on YouTube and also via the website. The bulletins are aimed at the clergy, and the videos at everyone. Please make whatever use you wish of them both. But the communication isn’t meant to be one-way: I am always happy to hear from my brother and sister clergy.

I look forward to “seeing” many of you at the re-affirmation of our ordination vows tomorrow.

With love in Christ

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