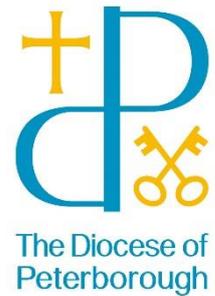


BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 8

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

20 April 2020



Dear friends

Back to normal?

We move forward from Easter week and “Low Sunday” into the normal rhythm of church life in this glorious Easter season. At the same time, we remain in the strange land of closed church buildings, physical distancing, and Eucharistic fasting. As clergy, we are now called to support the spiritual life of the faithful, to lead our churches in mission and service to their communities, to minister to the sick, to bury the dead, and to pay particular attention to the most needy around us. Over the next weeks or months, we will continue to find new ways of maintaining spiritual stability, growing discipleship, enabling the church to thrive, and attending to ourselves. You have my prayers and my support in this great endeavour.

I have heard of some clergy bowed down by the new burdens we are all carrying, and of others who don't really know what to do with themselves. I do strongly suggest at least weekly online meetings with colleagues (teams, deanery chapters, cell groups ... whatever). We need to ensure mutual prayer support, encouragement, and challenge. As I have said before, we are in this for the long haul. Let's make it sustainable, but let's also make it work. Don't be looking forward to the imagined “new normal” – instead, learn to be, to do, to lead, and to serve in our present strange land.

Bible studies

Bishop Andrew Proud is one of a number of us who have suffered covid-like symptoms in recent weeks, and have recovered. To all such: please continue to look after yourselves: this virus seems to weaken its victims significantly, and our bodies do take time to recover fully. I am grateful to Andrew for sending me a set of five Bible studies produced by the Anglican Alliance for these covid days. These will be used widely across the Anglican Communion, and I commend them warmly to you. They could form the basis of powerful midweek sessions for your folk, focussing on deep spiritual truth, but doing so in conscious communion with our sister churches around the world. Have a look anyway:

<https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/sqe-anglican/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/17154052/COVID-19-Bible-studies-Anglican-Alliance-.pdf>

I would be grateful to anyone else who wants to share with me any study or prayer resources which have proved helpful to you or your church in this time. I will gladly publicise through these bulletins any materials which might help us in our own lives or in our ministry.

Psychological needs

I'm attaching a paper produced by the British Psychological Society, addressing the likely psychological needs of those working in the healthcare professions during this crisis. We are not psychologists, but there is some real wisdom here, and I think we can draw out parallel lessons for the way we care for others and for ourselves. We should certainly be paying attention to those of our own communities working on the various frontlines. We will also have church members suffering similar stresses, even if at a lower intensity. And we should be looking for and attending to the signs of stress in our colleagues and ourselves.

I think the paper is worth a read, if only for the emphasis it puts on the need for visible leadership. Surely that is what we are called to in this situation: of course to be praying for our people, helping them to know God in all this, being "alongside" them as far as circumstances allow, but being there as spiritual leaders for them. That is one of their primary needs, particularly in times of crisis.

A living hope

Yesterday many of us will have read and pondered the wonderful words of 1 Peter 1:3-9. The emphases on being protected by the power of God for a salvation yet to be revealed, on rejoicing even if suffering various trials, and on our faith being tested as by fire, are highly relevant today.

The overall thrust is that in times of trial, even great trial, we can and should rejoice "with an indescribable and glorious joy" in all we have received "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". That is worth hearing again, and pondering deeply.

It may be that you didn't use that reading yesterday: there are so many alternatives in the Easter season. If that is the case, I do commend it for your study and meditation, and possibly as a source for some of the preaching, encouragement, or strengthening you will be called to offer in the coming days.

With love in Christ

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