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Dear Brothers and Sisters

I have been in touch with many, but by no means all of you, since the pandemic started – and I continue to pray that God will provide you with the strength you need for ministry in what has proved to be a draining and testing time. It's good to know that our heavenly Father is always at work (John 5:17) so we can rely on his strength at all times as well as the continuing witness of the Spirit who has worked in so many more people's lives during the restrictions than we would have expected. Needless to say, the Enemy is also active (1 Peter 5:8) and my heart has particularly gone out to those facing various kinds of opposition even as their workload has increased. For my own part, the combination of advising parishes during vacancies, providing pastoral support in difficult situations, preparing for monthly meetings online of the House of Bishops, and preparing recorded and live teaching material has meant that life has become very busy, even though much less time has been spent travelling. Thank you to those who have been in touch to reassure me of their prayers and even to ask when another newsletter might come out!

This month will mark the fifth anniversary of my consecration and I am hoping to produce a 5-year review in the next few months. God has provided wonderfully for this ministry and I am glad that even now a number of parishes are preparing to pass resolutions under the House of Bishops' Declaration. The latest (this summer) to join our number have been St David's at Moreton in Marsh, All Soul's at Langham Place, and Trinity in Islington. Earlier in the year, resolutions were also passed by St Paul's, Barton on the Isle of Wight and Holy Trinity, Lyonsdown. Over the course of the last 5 years the number of resolution churches has reached 146 (the full list is on the last two pages); a successful pattern of regional meetings has been established; I have been appointed as an Assistant Bishop in 16 dioceses; established clear working arrangements (most notably the London Plan) in 5 dioceses; confirmed 844 people at 97 confirmation services; ordained 30 men (priest or deacon) in 9 different dioceses and, during September and October, will be presiding at the ordination of a further 13 priests and deacons in various dioceses. To help me with this work I have been greatly blessed by a very involved Advisory Group as well as a one-day a week Pastoral Adviser in the Northern Province.

As I look forward to the next few years, I am very conscious that parishes will face many challenges as dioceses look at the effects of the pandemic on church life and resources. It will also be a time when the long-standing challenges related to sexuality and gender are likely to come to a head. Many of you will already know that the House of Bishops has established an 'LLF Implementation Group' under the chairmanship of the Bishop of London which will eventually make proposals to the

House of Bishops about the next steps the Church should be taking. I have agreed to serve as a member of that Group.

In order to help with the growing volume of work, I am delighted to say that resources have been made available for me to appoint both a half-time senior chaplain as well as a further one day-a-week Pastoral Adviser. With the agreement of the Diocese of Chelmsford, the Rev'd Mark Wallace will be joining me as a senior chaplain, sharing his time with St Peter's, Colchester, as their Priest in Charge, from the start of September. From 1st January, the Rev'd Dick Farr will be a further Pastoral Adviser, concentrating his work on the Southern Province.

I do hope it won't be too long before we are able to be in more normal physical contact. We are planning to resuscitate our regional meetings next year, even though we may have to restrict numbers and be in a suitably socially-distanced setting. Please put the dates in your diaries even if you fear postponement!

Every good wish
Rod Thomas

Regional Events

We had planned to run a series of regional meetings, in conjunction with Church Society, between March and June this year. In the event, only the first meeting went ahead – in Manchester, before lockdown caused the other three proposed meetings to be cancelled. We held a successful meeting in Manchester which was attended by around 90 people. The Bishop of Maidstone Regional Meeting, in the morning, dealt with complementarian issues. A discussion paper *Fellow Workers: Women and men in gospel ministry* written by Alan Purser was circulated in advance of the meeting. Part of the morning session was taken up with a thought provoking discussion between Rod and two women engaged in full time ministry – Caroline West, Permanent Deacon serving at St Mary Basingstoke and Anna de Castro employed as Families' Worker at Holy Cross Gleadless Valley Sheffield.

After lunch the Church Society ran a session on The Episcopacy with Lee Gatiss explaining the historical background and theological significance of ordering the Church through bishops and Rob Munro speaking about how we should relate to them.

All incumbents, as well as those who attended the Manchester meeting or planned to attend the Bristol meeting will have received copies of Lee's booklet *Evangelicals and their Bishops* and of *Fellow Workers*. Anyone else who would like us to send them printed copies of *Fellow Workers* and/or *Evangelicals and their Bishops* should send their request to office@bishopofmaidstone.org

It is hard to plan when these meetings might be able to resume and whether they would be subject to social distancing. At present we have provisional plans for dates and venues as follows:

- *Tuesday 9th March Bristol*: aimed at those from Bath & Wells, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, Salisbury, Winchester, Truro dioceses
- *Tuesday 23rd March, Solihull*: aimed at those from Birmingham, Coventry, Derby, Ely, Hereford, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Peterborough, St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, Worcester dioceses.
- *Wednesday 12th May, London*: aimed at those from Canterbury, Chelmsford, Chichester, Europe, Guildford, London, Portsmouth, Rochester, Southwark, St Albans dioceses.

There will be no charge for the day. Those attending the morning session will also benefit from a free lunch. You would be welcome to attend the morning and lunch only if you wish but, needless to say, we hope everyone will stay on for the whole day. Approximate timings will be:

- Morning session 10.30am – 12.45pm;
- Lunch for those attending morning session, only;
- Afternoon session 1.30pm – 4.00pm

We will be in touch once we are in a position to take bookings for these events and with an outline programme for the meetings.

Fellow Workers – Discussion Meetings

Following the Manchester regional meeting, two 2-hour discussion meetings have taken place over Zoom, on the question ‘What should complementarian ministry look like in the churches of early 21st century Britain? These have involved two groups of people: curates at evangelical resolution churches and women employed in a ministry role at these churches, but the issues raised are clearly relevant to all our churches and their leaders. A further meeting is planned for Thursday September 17th, 10am-12noon (it is not too late to join in – please contact David Banting for more information: pastoral.adviser@bishopofmaidstone.org). The meetings enable a more in depth discussion of issues raised by Alan Purser’s paper *Fellow Workers: Women and Men in Gospel Ministry* paper. To whet your appetite, some of the recommendations that have been suggested so far include:

- The permanent distinctive diaconate should be renewed / rebooted / promoted / prioritised
- Finances need to be made available for this and, in particular, for training and possible research about the way forward
- We should consider positively what women can and must do while maintaining the principle of male oversight in the local church (incumbency) and the wider church (episcopacy) as the basis from which other principles and actions are developed
- Further discussion should take place around questions of the validity and visibility of women leading services and taking on the position of warden
- There is a need to improve teaching about how to present and articulate complementarian beliefs both in church leadership and during job interviews in a manner which is construed as positive and generous
- There is value in churches establishing monitoring processes to continue to review the involvement of women in the church

Feedback indicates that the meetings have generally been found both illuminating and timely and the intention is that they feed forward into the 5-year review and Bishop Rod’s next Advisory Group meeting in November, which may then set some direction and priorities for the next 3 to 5 years.

As a subsidiary process Naomi, in my office, has gathered information about women who have ministry roles in resolution churches – paid or unpaid, full or part time with responsibility for an area of ministry. A response has been received from 131 of the 146 resolution churches. We have been told of 159 women working in ministry roles, of whom 7 are ordained and 5 are licensed lay ministers. If you have still to reply on this please send the information for your church to office@bishopofmaidstone.org Our hope is to run a research project in due course examining ways in which women ministers believe their ministry could be enhanced and encouraged in the future.

CDM Review

I know a number of clergy have been involved in CDM cases over the last year and without exception find that the process in which they are engaged is very stressful. The difficulties arising out of the process have been actively investigated by the Sheldon Community and widely publicised, so I am particularly pleased that Bishop Tim Thornton is leading a review. He recently reported to the House of Bishops and as a result the following statement appeared on the Sheldon Hub:

‘On 8th July the House of Bishops discussed two papers relating to the interim findings of the working group which is reviewing the current Clergy Discipline Measure¹

The first asked for the House’s commitment to working towards the replacement of the Clergy Discipline Measure with legislation which is more proportionate and nuanced, and which is grounded in a Christian understanding of professional standards.

The second, borne of the recognition that legislative change is time consuming, proposed a number of changes that can be made to the way the Measure functions to avoid many of the issues that Complainants and Respondents currently face.

Both papers were well received. The House committed unanimously to working towards replacing the Measure. It also committed to making interim procedural changes to ensure the current system is more workable until new legislation is enforced.²

Research into the reach of online ministry during lockdown and advice on online provision

A series of resources and reflections based on research into the development of online church during lockdown is available from the CPAS website, [here](#). Bob Jackson and George Fisher have researched developments in online church during lockdown, providing suggestions and analysis in a series of three papers. These are intended to help churches and ministers as we come out of lockdown and look to the future. They also look back at how churches made the rapid switch to online provision and how learning through this can be built on.

In a survey of 99 churches they found that³:

- 84% went online;
- 30% of individuals were ‘lost’ as they attended churches which did not go online or the individuals did not use the online provision at their church;
- However, overall attendance online is substantially greater than in person – total weekly attendance across all the surveyed churches rose by 49%. It is likely that this is made up of people accessing services who would not usually attend church and also by people attending services at more than one church;
- The percentage increase in attendance varied across platforms – Zoom only 17% decrease, other single-platform 51% increase, multi-platform 86% increase.

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/house-bishops-meet-discuss-covid-19-clergy-discipline-and-lambeth-conference>

² Posted on the Sheldon Hub: <https://www.sheldonthub.org/>

³

https://www.cpas.org.uk/download/3613/web_upload%252FEverybody%2BWelcome%2Bto%2Bthe%2BFuture-1590738624.pdf

The series of papers include a wealth of suggestions and observations and address difficulties faced in providing church online in terms of Sunday services and midweek meetings – both evangelistic and operational. They also look towards the future use of online meetings after actual meetings become possible.

Implementation and Dialogue Group

The Implementation and Dialogue Group was set up by the House of Bishops following the Independent Examiner's report on the circumstances which led Bishop Philip North to stand down from his nomination to the See of Sheffield. The Group has now reported to the House of Bishops, and, subject to a few further amendments, the report will be seen by General Synod in November.

The Group has sought to examine a range of issues related to the way in which 'mutual flourishing' is promoted within the Church and my own hope is that it will help boost understanding of the various positions as well as promote good practice. Given that as long ago as 2009, a report on senior appointments noted the clear under-representation of conservative evangelicals in senior positions, I also hope that it may start to address that problem.

Northern Province

As many of you will know, David Banting has been supporting churches in the Northern Province which have passed resolutions for the past 2 years. In addition, he has held meetings with ordinands immediately prior to their ordination in both Provinces. One of the sadnesses of the current situation is that it has not been possible to hold these meetings this year, although I will be having private conversations with each person I am ordaining.

Together with David, I am hoping to engage freshly with the new Archbishop of York. Both of us know him from his previous time in Chelmsford, but David in particular has been able to develop an effective working relationship. As we do this, we want to ensure that we are properly reflecting the concerns and thinking of complementarian clergy and other ministers in the Northern Province. Accordingly, I hope to convene a representative meeting of about ten people to advise on the issues they face. I value the support and guidance of my Advisory Group and it would be very good to build a similar source of advice in the north.

List of Resolution Parishes

It may puzzle some that despite new churches passing resolutions, the total reported in this newsletter has stayed static. This is partly because some congregations have opted to join AMiE or the FCE out of concern about the future doctrinal direction of the Church over matters of sexuality and gender and partly because some have reversed their resolutions when their vicar has vacated the living. The latter possibility can only really be addressed by regular (although not necessarily frequent) congregational teaching on men's and women's ministry. In addition, it is helpful to cover the ground when PCC awaydays are organised. Please let the office know if it would be helpful to have a visiting speaker to address these issues. If a Pastoral Adviser is not available, we may well be able to follow your request up with the Church Society or particular individuals.

Vacancies

Rector of All Souls Langham Place, London: All Souls are looking for a new Rector to lead the church

as it seeks to live out its vision to be “All for Jesus”. Details can be found on their website: <https://www.allsouls.org/Vacancies/> closing date 17 September.

Operations Director, Christ Church Fulwood, Sheffield: This is a senior leadership role supporting the operational running of church life working with a large staff team and helping to implement strategic plans related to the church’s vision, growth and development. For further details please contact Steph Johnson: stephjohnson@fulwoodchurch.co.uk Closing date 20th September.

Operations Manager, Dundonald Church, South West London: Dundonald is seeking an enthusiastic, forward-thinking and effective operations manager to provide and develop the operations to support the growing and exciting ministry of our church. Further details can be found at: www.dundonald.org/operations-manager or contact the Senior Assistant Pastor, Clayton Fopp, clayton.fopp@dundonald.org Closing date 11th September.

In addition, there are four parishes known to us where the incumbent has recently retired but recruitment for a successor has not yet started and a couple of other parishes in vacancy. Do please contact Rachel if you wish us to keep you updated, rachel.lickiss@bishopofmaidstone.org

Prayer Requests

Please give thanks to God for:

- New outreach opportunities that have come through the provision of online teaching material (eg the Church Society summer sermons)
- The provision of resources to enable a chaplain and further pastoral adviser to be recruited
- Opportunities to feed into the group that is reporting on LLF implementation to the House of Bishops.

Please pray for:

- Wisdom and stamina in relating to the House of Bishops, feeding into discussion on sexuality and gender, and providing pastoral support to those in difficult situations
- Those newly working alongside the Bishop of Maidstone – both the chaplain and the pastoral adviser and for the development of good teamwork.

**Resolution Parishes - resolutions passed by conservative evangelical churches,
1st September 2020: 146 resolutions**

Baths & Wells	St George, Wembdon	Chester	Christ Church, Wharton Holy Trinity, Poulton Lancelyn St Catherine, Tranmere St John, Hartford St John, Over St John, Lindow St John, Knutsford St John, Toft St Mark, New Ferry St Mary, Cheadle
Birmingham	St Agnes, Moseley St Stephen & St Wulstan, Selly Park	Chichester	All Saints Crowborough All Souls Eastbourne Bishop Hannington Hove Emmanuel Hastings Holy Trinity, Eastbourne Little Common, Bexhill
Blackburn	All Hallows Bispham All Saints Preston Christ Church Blackburn Church of the Saviour Blackburn Padiham St Andrew, Blackburn St Andrew, Ashton on Ribble St Andrew, Leyland St Bartholomew, Ewood Wellfield Church	Derby	Little Eaton St Alkmund, Duffield St Giles, Normanton St Mary, Chaddesden St Peter, Stapenhill St Stephen, Sinfin Trinity Church Buxton
Canterbury	All Saints, Loose Christ Church, Ramsgate St James, Westgate	Ely	All Saints, Little Shelford Christ Church, Cambridge Christ Church, Huntingdon St Andrew the Great, Cambridge St John, Orchard Park Terrington, St Clement St Matthew, Cambridge
Carlisle	Houghton and Kingmoor St Bridget, Moresby St James, Burton in Kendal St John, Hensingham St John, London Road, Carlisle	Europe	Leipzig
Chelmsford	Chadwell, St Mary Christ Church, Leyton Crossway Stratford Elsenham Fordham Henham Holy Cross, Felsted St George, Dagenham St John, Walthamstow St John, Great Clacton St Michael, Braintree St Paul Harold Hill & St Thomas Noak Hill St Peter, Colchester St Peter and St Paul, Dagenham St Peter, Harold Wood Ugley	Exeter	Christ Church, Paignton St Leonard, Exeter St Matthew, Elburton
		Gloucester	Moreton in Marsh
		Guildford	St Andrew, Frimley Green & Mytchett
		Leicester	Enderby Holy Trinity, Hinckley

Lichfield	Castle Church, Stafford Holy Trinity, Oswestry St James, Audley St Luke, Wolverhampton St Thomas, Kidsgrove	Rochester	Christ Church, Bromley St John, Tunbridge Wells St Nicholas, Sevenoaks St Peter, Bexley Heath St Peter, Tunbridge Wells
Liverpool	St Philemon Toxteth St Simon and St Jude Southport	Salisbury	St John, Wimborne
London	All Souls, Langham Place Christ Church, Cockfosters Christ Church, Mayfair Euston Church Grace Church, Highland St Anne, Limehouse St Benet, Paul's Wharf St Botolph without Aldersgate St Helen, Bishopsgate St John, Downshire Hill St John with St Andrew, Chelsea St Luke, Hampstead St Michael, Cornhill St Nicholas, Cole Abbey St Paul, Hadley Wood St Peter, Cornhill St Peter's Barge, Limehouse St Peter, Fulham St Thomas, Oakwood Trinity Islington	Sheffield	Christ Church, Endcliffe Christ Church, Fulwood Holy Cross, Gleadless Valley
		Sheffield (cont)	St Andrew, Kendray St Mary, Wheatley St Thomas, Kilnhurst
		Southwark	Dundonald Emmanuel, Wimbledon Grace Church Dulwich Grace Church Greenwich Holy Redeemer, Streatham Vale Holy Trinity, Wallington St Luke, Wimbledon St Nicholas, Tooting St Stephen, South Lambeth
		Southwell	St Mary, Wollaton Park
		St Albans	All Saints, Riseley Holy Trinity, Frogmore Holy Trinity, Lyonsdown
		Winchester	Christ Church, Westbourne Sherbourne St John, Basingstoke St Mary, Basingstoke
		York	St Andrew, Kirk Ella, Hull St Mark's Anlaby Common St Peter, Anlaby
Manchester	Christ Church, Chadderton St Mary, Balderstone		
Norwich	Christ Church, Lowestoft St Andrew, Honingham		
Oxford	Arborfield Barkham Christ Church, Wokingham Holy Trinity, Nuffield St Ebbe, Oxford St Mary, Maidenhead St Paul, Banbury		
Peterborough	St Peter and St Paul, Moulton		
Portsmouth	St Paul, Barton		