

Bishop of Maidstone's Newsletter

December 2020

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Letter from Bishop Rod

Dear Fellow Ministers

As a result of being invited to preach at St Peter's, Tunbridge Wells next week, I have decided to follow their book recommendation for Advent – it's Tim Chester's 'Fixated' from 10 Publishing - a series of Advent meditations from the Book of Hebrews. I know a number of you are similarly recommending this. Reading my way through the first few chapters of Hebrews has brought home to me afresh the radical nature of the gospel. Hebrews really doesn't mince words about the uniqueness of the Son. He displays God's glory ('the sum of all his perfections' to use Chester's words), is both creator of the universe and ruler of the world to come, the One whose pioneering work has delivered his people, made atonement for them, built them into God's household and is our brother. His majesty couldn't be greater nor his work for us more complete. It is so important therefore that we fix our eyes on him and avoid the danger of disregarding him or drifting from our great salvation.

One of the ways in which we can drift is by going quiet about some aspect of His word. Hebrews 3:6 says 'And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence ...' O'Brien points out in his commentary that the word 'confidence' can also be translated 'boldness', so the confidence to which we hold fast is both our internal attitude 'and an objective aspect, including the clear expression of public speaking.' This is both a challenge and an encouragement. By speaking clearly about New Testament truths, we are holding fast our confidence. I know that I'm going to have to do just that in defending the new CEEC video 'The Beautiful Story' which has excited much controversy – particularly in social media. My prayer is that I keep my eyes fixed on Jesus so that I don't go quiet.

It's also my prayer that we all speak up by engaging in the *Living in Love and Faith* conversations around dioceses.

I know that some fellow evangelicals think it a mistake to participate in *Living in Love and Faith (LLF)*, believing that repeated discussions are simply a means of softening opposition to change. I respect those views, but against them also weigh passages like Philippians 4:5 'Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.' The fact is that the LLF conversations do have an end point. While the resources will continue to be available, the diocesan conversations will be concluding towards the end of 2021 and the Next Steps Group (which will advise the House of Bishops) will be considering the outcome of these conversations and then putting proposals (or options) for the future to the House of Bishops during 2022. My own view therefore is that our participation is essential, both so that any proposals are properly informed and also so that we properly understand the views of others.

LLF apart, I am very conscious of how wearing the present circumstances are for so many clergy and church workers. Added to this is all the uncertainty of what restrictions will be in place during the first quarter of 2021 and then what our ministries will look like once the availability of vaccines enable these restrictions to be loosened. However I do know how much your ministry is appreciated and I still keep hearing accounts of how people have come to put their trust in the Lord Jesus through the various online ministries and other forms of outreach. I gather from discussions among bishops that there is also a new appreciation within government circles of the tremendous importance of church activities for the life of communities. Against that, I do also know that continued restrictions do nothing to help resolve the strains and tensions that can sometimes build up within teams and church councils, but I do pray that you will rely on the Lord's strength a day at a time and by keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus will continue to 'hold fast your confidence.'

Lastly, as we head towards Christmas, may I thank you for every encouragement you have provided over the past year and wish you and your loved ones every blessing for your Christmas services and (hopefully) for good breaks thereafter.

Every good wish

Rod Thomas

Fellow Workers

One of the Bishop's priorities is the active encouragement of the complementarian ministry of women. To facilitate this, there have been a series of meetings throughout this year, many of them via Zoom, seeking to identify specific steps the Bishop might take to help the ministry of women to flourish. A discussion paper, entitled 'Fellow Workers', is still available for download from the website.

This autumn, Bishop Rod commissioned Revd Dr Kirsten Birkett to undertake research into what might come next, and it is hoped this research will lead to specific steps being undertaken later in 2021. We are grateful to all who have contributed to the discussion meetings, and to all who have been willing to be contacted with regard to the research.

This remains a particular prayer need (see below).

Regional Events in 2021

We are looking forward to next year's Regional Events, and would like to encourage you to put the relevant date in your diary. We are planning on holding these events online (with the possible exception of the May Event, about which we will make a decision nearer the time). It is likely that the online Regional Events will run over half a day and that face-to-face meetings will run from mid-morning to mid-afternoon. We intend to hold meetings for all areas of the country apart from the north-west, the only region where we managed to hold an event before lockdown.

As things stand, we are planning the following:

- **Tuesday 9th March, online:** for those from Bath & Wells, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, Salisbury, Winchester, Truro dioceses (who would have attended the meeting in Bristol)
- **Tuesday 23rd March, online:** for those from Birmingham, Coventry, Derby, Ely, Hereford, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Peterborough, St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, Worcester dioceses (who would have attended the meeting in Solihull).
- **Wednesday 12th May, either online or in London:** for those from Canterbury, Chelmsford, Chichester, Europe, Guildford, London, Portsmouth, Rochester, Southwark, St Albans dioceses.

The planned programme will include input from the Bishop on the state of complementarian ministry in the Church of England at this time; it will also seek to address some of the wider issues facing our constituency, such as evangelical sub-culture, leadership styles, and the future for evangelicals in the CofE.

Further details will be sent out early in 2021.

Five Year Review

This autumn marked the fifth anniversary of the Bishop's consecration. To mark the occasion, we have produced a Five Year Review of Bishop Rod's ministry as the Bishop of Maidstone, which we hope will be of interest not only to incumbents, but also other clergy and PCC members, especially as it usefully outlines the shape of conservative evangelical ministry.

We are currently awaiting delivery of the publication from our printers, and copies will be mailed to all incumbents of resolution churches as soon as possible. An online version of the Five Year Review will be available on the website (www.bishopofmaidstone.org) from mid-December, via a link from the homepage. If you would like to request a printed copy, please do get in touch with the office.

Sunday visits from Bishop Rod to confirm and preach

Bishop Rod is always delighted to be invited for confirmation, and hopes that there may be many more such opportunities as restrictions are hopefully lifted in 2021. If you would like to get a date booked in the Bishop's diary (even a tentative one, bearing in mind the obvious uncertainties), please contact Rachel.

Northern Province Advisory Group

A new Advisory Group specifically for the Northern Province has recently been formed, and the first meeting is planned for 9th December.

The members of this Advisory Group are: Revd Nigel Atkinson, Revd Andy Brewerton, Revd Paul Darlington, Mrs Anna de Castro, Revd Brian Elfick, Revd Dr Paul Mathole, Revd Rob Munro, Revd James Nash, Revd Mike Smith, Revd Andrew Towner, Revd Steve Wilcox, and Miss Debbie Woods.

Vacancies

We have heard from a number of final year theological college students looking for curacies to start in 2021. In addition, we have been contacted by several people in the final year of their curacy looking for associate minister, or similar, positions for next year.

If you would be interested to know more, or can advise of a vacancy, please contact Rachel.

Ordinations in 2021

If you are considering asking for an ordination to be taken by Bishop Rod in 2021 and have not yet contacted us, please let Rachel know as soon as possible.

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.

In addition, the Guidance which accompanies the House of Bishops' Declaration makes clear that it is expected that a PCC will review their resolution from time to time. Some resolutions have now been in force for five years, and Bishop Rod suggests that this would be an appropriate timescale for a PCC to reconsider their resolution – following the same procedure as for originally considering and passing it.

The latest list of Resolution Parishes is attached at the end of this Newsletter.

Bishop's Staff Team & Contact Details

As the demands on the Bishop of Maidstone continue to increase, we are delighted that additional resources have enabled further valuable staff to be appointed.

As announced in the September newsletter, Revd Dick Farr will be joining the Bishop's Staff Team to work one day a week as a Pastoral Adviser working in the Southern Province. He will work alongside Revd Canon David Banting, who does a similar job in the Northern Province, and Revd Mark Wallace, who joined the Staff Team in September as the Bishop's part-time Senior Chaplain.

Contact details for the Bishop's Staff Team are as follows:

The Bishop of Maidstone

Rt Revd Rod Thomas rod.thomas@bishopofmaidstone.org 01342 834140

Bishop's Personal Assistant

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Pastoral Adviser (for the Northern Province)

Revd Canon David Banting pastoral.adviser@bishopofmaidstone.org

Pastoral Adviser (for the Southern Province)

Revd Dick Farr rw.farr@bishopofmaidstone.org

Senior Chaplain

Revd Mark Wallace mark.wallace@bishopofmaidstone.org 07772 615378

Prayer Requests

Please give thanks to God for:

- For the last five years of episcopal ministry, which have seen the gospel preached, many confirmed, a total of 147 resolutions passed by evangelical church councils are in place, the development of my role in relation to the sponsorship of ordinands and ordinations, the gradual adoption of the London Plan, and a growing role in filling vacancies.
- For the provision of pastoral advisers and a chaplain to help in the ministry in addition to Rachel and Naomi who provide vital office support.

Please pray:

- For God's blessing on the work of the new Northern Advisory Group as well as on the ministry of Dick Farr who becomes my Pastoral Adviser in the Southern province from the start of January

- That the stresses and strains of the current pandemic restrictions wouldn't exacerbate difficulties that have arisen in some parishes and that my own involvement in some of these would be positive
 - That I would be able to speak with grace, wisdom and courage on the Next Steps Group
 - For God's blessing on Kirsten Birkett as she designs and undertakes the research project into steps that could be taken to enable those in women's complementarian ministry to flourish.
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Parishes with resolutions in place (1st December 2020, 147 parishes)

Bath & Wells

St George, Wembdon

Birmingham

St Agnes, Moseley

St Stephen & St Wulstan, Selly Park

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

Canterbury

All Saints, Loose

Christ Church, Ramsgate

St James, Westgate

Carlisle

Houghton and Kingmoor

St Bridget, Moresby

St James, Burton in Kendal

St John, Hensingham

St John, London Road, Carlisle

Chelmsford

Chadwell, St Mary

Christ Church, Leyton

Crossway Stratford

Elsenham

All Saints, 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

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

Chichester

All Saints Crowborough

All Souls Eastbourne

Bishop Hannington Hove

Emmanuel Hastings

Holy Trinity, Eastbourne

Little Common, Bexhill

Derby

Little Eaton

St Alkmund, Duffield

St Giles, Normanton

St Mary, Chaddesden

St Peter, Stapenhill

St Stephen, Sinfin

Trinity Church Buxton

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

Europe

Leipzig

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

Liverpool

St Philemon Toxteth
St Simon and St Jude Southport

London

All Souls, Langham Place
Christ Church, Cockfosters
Christ Church, Mayfair
Euston Church
Grace Church, Highlands
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

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

Rochester

Christ Church, Bromley
St John, Tunbridge Wells
St Nicholas, Sevenoaks
St Peter, Bexley Heath
St Peter, Tunbridge Wells

Salisbury

St John, Wimborne

Sheffield

Christ Church, Endcliffe
Christ Church, Fulwood
Holy Cross, Gleadless Valley
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

Truro

St Fimbarrus, Fowey

Winchester

Christ Church, Westbourne
Sherborne St John, Basingstoke
St Mary, Basingstoke

York

St Andrew, Kirk Ella, Hull
St Mark's Anlaby Common
St Peter, Anlaby