

Bishop of Maidstone's Newsletter

Pre-Easter 2021

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Pastoral Letter from Bishop Rod

Dear Fellow Ministers

'On him we have set our hope' (2 Corinthians 1:10)

I've often wondered how Paul kept going, given the circumstances he faced. Take 2 Timothy for example. The whole letter is set against a very discouraging background of imprisonment and widespread apostasy. Or take 2 Corinthians. In chapter 1, Paul talks of being 'so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself' (verse 8). But as he looks back on a dreadful time, he concludes that 'this was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly a peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again' (vv 9-10).

As we come towards the end of the third lockdown, I'm very conscious of the unremitting pressure on church leadership teams to keep ministering online, while individual members have to balance this with care for their families, and all in the relative isolation of lockdown. On top of this comes the need to plan for a changed future when there are still so many unknowns. So it is wonderfully reassuring to take to heart the conclusion Paul reached in 2 Corinthians that the way forward doesn't depend on us. Certainly we take action, but the results are in the Lord's hands and so far as we personally are concerned, he will deliver us. None of us have anything to prove as we come out of lockdown. Indeed as a later chapter in 2 Corinthians makes clear, God's strength is made known in

our weakness – so, says Paul, ‘I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.’

Feeling our weakness therefore, we can rely on the Lord’s strength for the future – and it’s in that confidence that we need to plan. For my own part, I’m seeking to press on with recent initiatives such as the holding of online Regional Meetings, the development of a new guidance pack for PCCs and others, and new work which aims to identify the ways in which women can better be encouraged in their local church ministries. You’ll find reports on these initiatives in this newsletter and there’ll be more detail provided at the Regional Meetings.

So far as your own planning is concerned, I know that many will be completely taken up with preparations for re-opening churches for physical services. However, once the immediate priorities have been addressed, do let Rachel know if you are thinking of Confirmation Services later in the year, or indeed any other service to which you might like to invite me. I can see from my diary that travelling is going to re-start for me in the second half of April, so the sooner you can get even tentative dates in the diary for later in the year, the better.

Finally, do feel free to get in touch if you want to chat through the whole issue of how best congregations might engage with the LLF resources. We’re covering this topic in the present round of Regional Meetings so I hope you find them a help too. Simon Austen has written a really good paper examining what lies behind the LLF way of approaching the issues of sexuality, marriage and gender – and you can find this by going to the ‘Guidance’ section of my web site, and then in the left hand column clicking on ‘One rector’s response to the LLF material.’

This comes with my best wishes for the forthcoming Easter season as once again we reflect on the Cross and Resurrection. As we do so, let’s remind ourselves afresh of the words of 2 Corinthians 1:9 – We ‘rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.’

With every good wish,

Rod Thomas

An Update on the Bishop’s Six Priorities for this Quinquennium

The Bishop’s Five Year Review, published just before Christmas, identified six priorities for the next five years (ie 2020-2025). Further information can be found in the Review document, which is available for download from the Bishop’s website ([here](#)).

1. Active encouragement of the complementarian ministry of women

A series of consultations have been held in recent months, involving women in ministry, senior incumbents, and curates to identify specific steps the Bishop might take to encourage the complementarian ministry of women. This work will continue over the coming weeks, and will be supplemented by survey material being produced by Dr Kirsten Birkett. Bishop Rod hopes to make specific recommendations later in the year.

2. Development of a sustainable pattern of pastoral care

The extension of the Bishop’s Staff Team has opened up possibilities for extending the pastoral care the Bishop is able to offer to clergy. This is something Bishop Rod hopes to develop in light of the Regional Meetings being held in the coming weeks. In addition, the Bishop is hoping to

host online 'Coffee Breaks' where a bible thought can be shared and participants can raise any current issues. These will be open to complementarian clergy with active responsibilities in the Church of England, and can be booked [via Eventbrite](#).

Meanwhile, progress has been made in arranging for clergy in the Oxford Diocese to have their MDRs carried out by the Bishop of Maidstone and his team, according to the provisions of the Oxford Plan (agreed in 2019). Clergy in other dioceses interested in pursuing the possibility of having their MDRs carried out in this way are invited to contact Bishop Rod directly.

3. Promotion of excellent and affordable training opportunities for ordinands

Both Rod and Mark spoke in January at the recent *Why Get Ordained* event run by Oak Hill, for those considering ordination. Meanwhile, events (mini online retreats) are being planned for those getting ordained by Bishop Rod later this year. Consideration is also being given to the means by which training is funded, and what forms of support might be appropriate for the future.

4. Promotion of senior leadership

Bishop Rod has written to the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments (Mrs Caroline Boddington), and also to Rev John Dunnett of CPAS, to initiate a process by which conservative evangelicals might be better prepared for potential positions of senior leadership. If incumbents know anyone who ought to be invited to participate in this process, please let Rod know.

5. Engagement with church planting programmes

At the invitation of Ric Thorpe, the Bishop of Islington, who oversees the Diocese of London's church planting and supporting church planting nationally, Bishop Rod is involved in helping set up a meeting in June to examine what assistance might be needed to encourage conservative evangelicals to undertake further church planting and church revitalisation – and what challenges need to be overcome.

6. Resolution on issues of controversy

Bishop Rod continues to serve on the LLF Next Steps group, although it will be the end of the year before we have an indication of how things are moving. In the meantime, an analysis of the LLF material is being presented at each of the current Regional Meetings and discussions about how best to participate are being promoted.

Regional Meetings in 2021

Bishop Rod is grateful to all who have registered for one of this year's Regional Meetings on Zoom, and looks forward to the opportunity to work through together some of the challenges we face. The four main sessions will focus on facing the challenges...

1. ... in a period of Covid-recovery
2. ... to complementarian ministry
3. ... to our evangelical sub-culture
4. ... in engaging with LLF

These online Regional Meetings are open to all in leadership (both lay and ordained) of resolution parishes. Clergy who are sympathetic to the complementarian theological position, but are not themselves in resolution parishes at this time, are also very welcome. Further information is available on the website.

- **Tuesday 23rd March – for those in the midlands region.** Specifically, this is for those in the dioceses of Birmingham, Coventry, Derby, Ely, Hereford, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Norwich, Oxford, Peterborough, St Eds & Ips, and Worcester. [[book here](#)]
- **Wednesday 12th May – for those in the south-eastern region.** Specifically, this is for those in the dioceses of Canterbury, Chelmsford, Chichester, Europe, Guildford, London, Portsmouth, Rochester, St Albans, and Southwark. [[book here](#)]
- **Thursday 10th June – for those in the Province of York.** Specifically, this is for those in the dioceses of Blackburn, Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, Sodor & Man, Southwell & Nottingham, and York. [[book here](#)]

If you are unable to attend the Regional Meeting for your own region, you are welcome to attend an alternative. A meeting for those in the south-west took place on 9th March, but any from that region are welcome to join us on one of the dates above.

An Introduction from Dick Farr

I've been asked to introduce myself, as Rod's pastoral advisor in the southern province. I currently serve as associate vicar at St John's Tunbridge Wells, having moved here after 19 years as vicar of Henham, Elsenham and Ugley, in Chelmsford Diocese, where we became a Resolution C parish. I have been involved with the patronage work of Church Society for many years.

In preparing to preach Exodus, I have very much enjoyed getting reacquainted with Shiphrah and Puah. They are the Hebrew midwives who face down Pharaoh because they fear the Lord. They disobeyed Pharaoh's instruction to kill the Jewish boy babies because they served a greater King, and so the nation was blessed as it continued to grow, they were blessed and granted families, and God's purposes to bring His people back to the Promised Land were served.

They stand as model Israelites, who fear and obey the Lord God, at the beginning of a book that seems to be more about the disobedience of Israel, and of course Moses. They stand as examples for us as we face opposition. They remind us that the One we serve is greater than anyone or anything that opposes us. They remind us of the courage God's people through the ages, who have feared and obeyed the Lord God in the face of those who would kill, imprison, silence, ostracise them. They point us to Jesus who endured injustice and death yet *continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly* (1 Peter 2.23).

May we follow His, and their, good example, as we contend for the Gospel today, and as we face opposition from different quarters and over different issues. For He is trustworthy and the victory belongs to Him.

Best wishes,

Dick Farr

Online Resources for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Season

Bishop Rod has been invited by Church Society to contribute a short talk for Maundy Thursday, as part of their provision for churches in Holy Week. These Church Society sermons can be accessed via https://churchsociety.org/blog/entry/church_society_easter_sermons

There are also some online reflections for Good Friday that the Bishop has made available (similar to last year's, which a number of churches found helpful). These can be accessed online via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jm8iU4niY7Y> and churches are encouraged to make use of them in whatever way they feel most helpful.

Bishop Rod will also be leading one of the online teaching sessions on Holy Communion being organised by the Bishop of Lichfield. His talk on 'Remembering' will be available during the week beginning 25th April – and should be accessible via the Diocese's web site.

Meeting with the Archbishop of York (24th May)

Bishop Rod will be meeting with the Archbishop of York, the Most Revd Stephen Cottrell, at Bishopsthorpe in May. The Bishop's Pastoral Adviser for the Northern Province, Revd Canon David Banting, will also attend. When he was first appointed, the Archbishop said he would welcome such a meeting. Bishop Rod discussed this with the Northern Advisory Group last December and will be keen to encourage the Archbishop to take steps enabling him to minister in the diocese of York. He will also draw the Archbishop's attention to the advantages that having a clear protocol in place, such as the London Plan, can have. Please do pray for the meeting; it would be good if York could give further momentum to mutual flourishing across all the dioceses in the Northern Province

Vacancies

We have been asked to make people aware of the following positions available later in the year:

- Worship Ministry Leader, Dundonald Church, London – www.dundonald.org/jobs
- Ministry Trainee Positions in West Hull – www.ninethirtyeight.org/job/hull-churches-21/
- Associate Minister, St Kea, Truro -- contact [Rachel](#) for details

Meanwhile, the Bishop of Plymouth would love to hear from anyone who might be interested in a house for duty post a few miles outside Exeter. The parish concerned has previously received ministry from a retired conservative evangelical vicar. Please contact Rachel or the Bishop of Plymouth's office for details.

If you would like to advertise a vacancy, or be kept in advised of vacancies which we are notified of, please contact Rachel (details below).

Requests for the Bishop's Diary

As the lockdown looks likely to be lifted in the coming weeks, Bishop Rod would be pleased to be invited to attend church services and meetings. For example, he is always pleased to be invited to carry out a Confirmation Service (even if 'only' for a few candidates), and he welcomes invitations to preach. In addition, he is willing to be available to help those PCCs who are considering passing a resolution under the House of Bishop's Declaration. Rod has good availability from September onwards.

His Pastoral Advisers, David Banting (Northern Province) and Dick Farr (Southern Province) are also available to be asked to preach or to attend church meetings.

Initial queries should be directed to Rachel Lickiss (contact details below).

Bishop's Coffee Breaks

Bishop Rod wants to be more accessible to clergy in 'resolution parishes'. One way he hopes to do this is by being available for a coffee and a catch-up via Zoom, for those who would find this helpful. There will be a chance to look at the Bible and pray together, and also an opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues that you would like to talk through with the Bishop.

For now, these Bishop's Coffee Breaks are for complementarian clergy with active congregational responsibilities in the Church of England. It may be possible, in time, to open these up to others as well - so do please drop us an email if you would be interested in the future. If you have any questions about any of this, or are uncertain about whether these are for you, please feel free to [email the Bishop's Chaplain](#).

The initial openings for coffee are on Monday 26th April (2pm), Wednesday 28th April (10:30am), Monday 10th May (2pm), and Friday 14th May (10:30am). These Coffee Break slots can be booked via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bishops-coffee-breaks-tickets-146488132949>

Bishop's Staff Team & Contact Details

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

The Bishop of Maidstone

- Rt Revd Rod Thomas 01342 834140 bishop@bishopofmaidstone.org

Bishop's Senior PA

- Mrs Rachel Lickiss 07377 362407 rachel.lickiss@bishopofmaidstone.org

Pastoral Advisers

- Revd Canon David Banting (*Northern Province*) pastoral.adviser@bishopofmaidstone.org
- Revd Dick Farr (*Southern Province*) rw.farr@bishopofmaidstone.org

Senior Chaplain

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

Prayer Requests

Please give thanks to God for:

- Those preparing for their ordination by Bishop Rod this year. These include:
 - Jonnie Armstrong, to be ordained Deacon in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - Drew Balch, to be ordained Deacon in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - Andrew Bellis, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of Chelmsford (28th June)
 - Simon Dickson, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of London (7th July) *
 - Callum Elwood, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - Phil Hudson, to be ordained Deacon in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - Phil Keen, to be ordained Deacon in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - Matthew Lawes, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of Sheffield (7th July)
 - Jono Simpson, to be ordained Deacon in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - Paul Sutton, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of Exeter (25th September)
 - Ed Underhill, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of London (7th July)
 - James Weaver, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of Lichfield (20th June)
 - Tom Wright, to be ordained Presbyter in the Diocese of London (7th July).

[NB. Simon was ordained Deacon by Bishop Rod in 2020, and will be ordained Presbyter by the Bishop of Kensington in July 2021.]*

- The work of the two Advisory Groups which not only advise Bishop Rod on some of the issues currently facing him, but also support him with encouragement, godly insight and prayer.
- The way the Five Year Review has been received by Diocesan Bishops and Church House staff. A number have commented that it has given them a fresh insight into the ministry that is undertaken.

Please pray:

- That the pastoral situations with which Bishop Rod is involved would result in the right support for individuals and Christ-glorifying outcomes.
- That we would reflect well on reports such as that provided for The Crowded House by 31:8 and take to heart the learning that is suggested for the wider church.
- That the Regional Meetings would be well-attended, and genuinely useful to all those involved in ministry in these difficult times.
- That Rod would be blessed with grace, wisdom and courage on the LLF Next Steps Group.
- That the meeting with the Archbishop of York would be positive and productive.
- For Kirsten Birkett and others supporting the Bishop's efforts to put in place measures to enable those in women's complementarian ministry to flourish.

List of Resolution Parishes (as of 1st March 2021, 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

St Andrew, Blackburn

St Andrew, Ashton on Ribble

St Andrew, Leyland

St Bartholomew, Ewood

St Leonard, Padiham & St Margaret, Hapton

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

All Saints, Fordham

Holy Cross, Felsted

St George, Dagenham

St John, Walthamstow

St John, Great Clacton

St Mary, Elsenham

St Mary, Henham

St Michael, Braintree

St Paul Harold Hill & St Thomas Noak Hill

St Peter, Colchester

St Peter and St Paul, Dagenham

St Peter, Harold Wood

St Peter, 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

St Alkmund, Duffield

St Giles, Normanton

St Mary, Chaddesden

St Paul, Little Easton

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

St David, Moreton-in-Marsh

Guildford

St Andrew, Frimley Green & Mytchett

Leicester

Enderby Parish Church
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 Church
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