

Bishop of Maidstone's Newsletter

July 2021

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Pastoral Letter from Bishop Rod

Dear Fellow Ministers

It has been a gruelling year so far with the unremitting pressure of maintaining ministry during the pandemic, the deeply disturbing questions posed by (and to) the 31:8 report on Emmanuel and Jonathan Fletcher, and the growing concerns over the Living in Love and Faith process. I do hope that the next few weeks will give you the chance for a break.

It was very good to see many of you at our Zoom regional meetings this year. Over 300 of you attended and I was very grateful for the subsequent feedback you offered. A good number of you reported that you found the exposition of 2 Corinthians 7:10-13 (which I offered at the third and fourth meetings) a particular help and asked if there were notes of it. I thought therefore that I would produce a summary of it here. For those who would like the full version, it can be found [online here](#).

2 Corinthians 7:10-13

Just as the Corinthians must have been shocked by the eye-opening nature of Paul's 'severe letter', so too have we been shocked by the 31:8 report. As our culture has been examined, we've seen how we've tolerated approaches to ministry which have strayed from New Testament teaching.

But Paul's purpose in writing was restorative, not destructive. So let's look at the route the Corinthians took back to restoration – which led Paul to say 'I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you' (v16).

Godly Grief

Verse 10 contrasts godly grief and worldly grief. Presumably there is real grief in both: sorrow, shame and remorse. We grieve over the suffering of victims as well as our own anguish about what seems to be a tarnished ministry. But the difference between the two types of grief is that one is divinely purposed and leads to salvation whereas the other is worldly (eg grief at being found out; grief at reputational damage). Godly grief reveals a desire to follow the Apostolic word (v12). It's godly because it's concerned with how God sees us.

For the Corinthians, a particular issue revealed a wider problem (their attitude to Paul's apostolic authority). For us, a particular issue has revealed a wider problem about culture, where there may be unthinking disobedience to God's Word. If our grief leads us to tackle this, it won't lead to the death of evangelical spirituality; it will lead to 'salvation without regret' (v10).

Repentance in Action

Restoration went by way of repentance. For the Corinthians this was shown in action (v11). They were:

- a) Eager to clear themselves. This doesn't mean they wanted to justify themselves, but rather to get on with addressing the problem.
- b) Indignant. This is a right response to the past.
- c) Fearful. They feared destroying the link with the Apostle.
- d) Earnest. They longed both for a restored relationship with the Apostle and were prepared for obedience (v15).
- e) Concerned for justice. Paul Barnett's commentary translates the phrase 'what punishment' in v11 (ESV) 'what readiness to see justice done.'

These present a picture of a thorough-going course of repentant action.

The Restoration of Relationships

The Pauline epistles present a wonderful balance: when difficult things are said, they are often matched with an expression of love and care. Paul himself looks forward to the restoration of the person who has caused harm in chapter 2, saying that after punishment should come forgiveness so that the wrongdoer is 'not overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.' Here in chapter 7 he speaks of his delight at the true repentance Titus has found.

We have to go through a particular period of repentance and seek to put things right. But we also look forward to restored relationships where trust and unity is re-established. As we do this, let's treat each other carefully, knowing that our aim is not to justify falling out, but to re-establish unity as we seek to follow Christ in a genuinely New Testament way.

Every good wish

Rod Thomas

Feedback on the 2021 Regional Meetings

Bishop Rod has now completed a successful programme of regional meetings where various current challenges were tackled. These meetings were held virtually and were attended by over 300 delegates – clergy and members of leadership teams of resolution churches and other clergy who

hold complementarian beliefs. The material covered included the two 31:8 reports on the Crowded House in Sheffield and Jonathan Fletcher/Emmanuel; the current challenges for complementarian ministry; and issues connected with the 'Living in Love and Faith' process. The first two meetings (covering the Midlands and the South West) were different from the latter two (covering London and the South East and the North). This was because the 31:8 Report on Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel was published between the two sets of meetings. Nevertheless, issues relating to evangelical culture were explored at both. They were a useful time of sharing and discussing information with good opportunity to ask questions.

In light of the feedback received after the Regional Meetings, the intention is to proceed with face-to-face Regional Meetings in 2022 once again, and planning for those will start in the autumn.

Formation of the Bishop's Working Group

Bishop Rod has now brought together a small working group to develop ways of helping parishes respond to some of the cultural issues we face. A number of these arise out of the 31:8 Report on Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel; others are a consequence of the recommendations in the recent survey report on women's ministry, produced by the Revd Dr Kirsten Birkett.

So far as the 31:8 Report is concerned, the working group is conscious that steps are being taken by others to implement some of its recommendations. In particular, we look forward to the forthcoming material being produced by the CEEC, some of which is designed to help churches audit their own situations. However, other issues can helpfully be addressed by the Working Group such as how best to develop a working relationship with a diocese with whom you have substantial theological differences, how to enhance collaborative leadership within the Anglican context, and how to navigate the sometimes conflicting requirements of transparency and confidentiality.

The survey report by Kirsten Birkett is available to view in full on the Maidstone website [[here](#)]. Bishop Rod commended its 'excellent, careful and thorough work' and said that its findings give complementarian evangelicals much encouragement – but at the same time were a real challenge to any sense of complacency.

Encouragements were that:

- 89% of respondents were either 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied in their ministries
- 93% of respondents felt 'very' or 'somewhat' satisfied in their roles
- 77% of respondents felt the complementarian stance of their churches helped their ministries

However, the Rev Dr Kirsten Birkett also encountered a number of comments about the sense of isolation women ministers can feel; the fact that sometimes they suffer unequal treatment compared to male ministers; and that they can feel under-valued. A key area of concern was access to continued ministerial training. 35% of respondents said they had not been encouraged to undertake further training. 51% said they would pursue such training if funding (and work time) were available and there was a job to which they could return.

Dr Birkett's report concluded with six recommendations for action which will be considered by the Working Group. These relate to training, pastoral encouragement, the development of supportive networks, pay, complementarian expectations and employment guidelines.

Members of the working group are: Rachel Browning (Christ Church, Cambridge); Tony Clarke (National Safeguarding Team); Jason Roach (The Bridge, Battersea); Mike Smith (St John's, Hartford); Barbara Sweeting (Christ Church, Leyton); and Mark Wallace (Secretary).

Meeting with the Archbishop of York

Bishop Rod and his pastoral adviser for the Northern Province, David Banting, met with Archbishop Stephen on Monday 24th May. The meeting was extremely helpful in moving towards a common understanding of what Bishop Rod's role might be for parishes requesting episcopal ministry from the Bishop of Maidstone under the current arrangements. Archbishop Stephen is to discuss this matter with his fellow bishops and Bishop Rod looks forward to his response in due course.

New Standing Commission on the House of Bishops' Declaration

There was a 'take note' debate at General Synod this month on the report of the Implementation and Dialogue Group (IDG), which was covered by a paper from the House of Bishops announcing a new Standing Commission. The IDG report had made a number of proposals – including the slightly contentious suggestion that dioceses with more than one suffragan bishop should consider the needs of the wider church in making an appointment, in order to address under-representation, for example among conservative evangelicals. It was felt by the House that the report, which had been delayed, now failed to reflect fully the experiences of the women bishops who had now been appointed. Rather than withdraw the report, the House added its further paper with the announcement of the new Standing Commission. Its role will be to help dioceses monitor the implementation of the Declaration. It will not seek to replace the role of the Independent Reviewer who remains in place in order to receive complaints from those PCCs which feel that their theological convictions over men's and women's ministry have not been respected.

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

Bishop Rod commissioned Dr Kirsten Birkett to carry out a survey of women's experiences in ministry roles. The report has now been published in full ([here](#)), and a statement of complementarian principles is being prepared for publication in the near future.

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 and he is currently exploring the possibility of appointing a pastoral adviser for women in ministry. During May and June the two pastoral advisers have, between them, been able to be actively involved in 19 pastoral matters in addition to other pastoral matters dealt with by Rod and Mark.

Bishop Rod trialled monthly online 'coffee breaks' during the late spring. Further events of this type are planned for the autumn.

3. Promotion of excellent and affordable training opportunities for ordinands

Bishop Rod and Mark ran two Ordinands' Events (mini retreats) on Zoom for those to be ordained by Bishop Rod this year: one for those to be ordained Deacon, another for those to be ordained Presbyter.

Bishop Rod is supporting the Oak Hill College recent endeavours for funding 10 fulltime places for those who might not usually have been able to consider fulltime training.

4. Promotion of senior leadership

Bishop Rod continues to support the Strategic Leadership Development Programme (SLDP). A candidate was nominated by him and accepted for the programme.

The Bishop intends to raise questions of succession to the See of Maidstone when he meets with the Archbishop of Canterbury in early September.

5. Engagement with church planting programmes

Bishop Rod has been actively supporting church planting, for example, through St Philemon's Church in Toxteth, Liverpool. He is also involved in discussions about moving established plants on to having BMO status.

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. The group has met monthly since June 2020.

The recent Bishop of Maidstone Regional Meetings have included discussion of LLF based on Simon Austen's paper. This paper can be found [here](#). Since the outcome of the LLF process will be among the early major issues considered by the next General Synod, Rod is keen to promote candidates standing for the forthcoming elections in the autumn.

Requests for the Bishop's Diary

Bishop Rod is always pleased to be invited to attend church services and meetings. He welcomes invitations to preach and will do his best to be available to carry out Confirmation Services (even if 'only' for a few candidates).

In addition, the Bishop and both his Pastoral Advisers (David Banting in the Province of York and Dick Farr in the Province of Canterbury) are available to help those PCCs who are considering passing a resolution under the House of Bishop's Declaration, or who have wider questions about the role and value of the Bishop of Maidstone in the present climate. David and Dick are also available to be asked to preach.

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 breaks are:

1. Monday 13th September (2pm-3pm)
2. Wednesday 29th September (2pm-3pm)

These Coffee Break slots can be booked via Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bishops-coffee-breaks-tickets-146488132949>

Curacies

We have had enquiries from ordinands as to whether we know of curacies for 2022. If you are expecting to be able to have a curate it would be helpful if you could let us know and also to let us know whether you are able to look beyond those sponsored by your own diocese.

Sponsorship and Ordinations

During 2020-21 Bishop Rod has sponsored 2 candidates for selection panels in Oxford Diocese and 8 in London Diocese. Panels are continuing into July but to date all those sponsored have been accepted for ordination training.

The Petertide ordinations are currently underway, with the Bishop ordaining 13 men in 5 dioceses. Further details, and photographs, are available [on the website](#).

Ministerial Development Reviews

Bishop Rod has carried out MDRs in several dioceses: Rochester, London, Sheffield, Carlisle and Liverpool. His office is currently working to establish the framework for MDRs for clergy of resolution churches in Oxford Diocese. The expectation is that clergy who opt to have these with the Bishop of Maidstone's team will have a review with Bishop Rod some years and a member of his team in other years. The process under which the Bishop carries out MDRs in London is in the process of being formalised along similar lines. Anyone who would like to explore the possibility of having their MDR with Bishop Rod or a member of his team should contact his senior PA, Rachel, in the first instance: rachel.lickiss@bishopofmaidstone.org

Office Staffing

As many of you will know, Naomi Teasdale has been carrying out admin work to assist Rachel, as needed. We are pleased to say that Naomi has been appointed to the position of Admin Assistant and will now be working 12 hours a week on an employed basis. Her primary responsibility will be data management, including setting up a database on Church Suite – you will be hearing more from her on this in due course. We are very pleased to welcome Naomi to her more formal role. She can be contacted on office@bishopofmaidstone.org

Bishop's Staff Team & Contact Details

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

Admin Assistant

- Mrs Naomi Teasdale 01342 834140 office@bishopofmaidstone.org

Pastoral Advisers

- Revd Canon David Banting 07949 592230 pastoral.adviser@bishopofmaidstone.org
- Revd Dick Farr 07871 657920 rw.farr@bishopofmaidstone.org

Senior Chaplain

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

Please give thanks to God for:

- The steadiness of resolve to promote the gospel seen in so many churches and demonstrated at this year's regional meetings, despite tiredness and anxiety over the 31:8 report.
- The formation of the New Standing Commission on the House of Bishops' Declaration to help monitor the implementation of the Declaration and the five 'guiding principles'.
- The survey report by the Revd Dr Kirsten Birkett and for its encouragement to develop women's ministry.

Please pray that:

- Bishop Rod's working group will develop effective means of addressing some of the recommendations in the 31:8 report as well as the recommendations in the survey report on women's ministry.
- Bishop Rod would be given wisdom and sensitivity in seeking to help with a number of pastoral difficulties in parishes in various dioceses as well as in those appointments where he is involved.
- It will be possible for Bishop Rod to appoint a new Pastoral Adviser specifically to help with women's ministry in the near future.

List of Resolution Parishes (as of 1st July 2021, 145 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

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

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 Eaton

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