

Bishop of Maidstone's Newsletter

Advent 2021

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Pastoral Letter from Bishop Rod: Opportunity in a Time of Uncertainty

Dear Fellow Ministers,

*'I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,
who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:
preach the word; be ready in season and out of season;
reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.'* (2 Tim 4.1-2 ESV)

Another variant and with it more uncertainty. The wearying nature of this pandemic is enough to make us all approach ministry with a sense of resignation. However, this great Advent message from Paul conveys a sense of commitment and urgency as he reminds Timothy that in view of Christ's appearing and his kingdom he is to fulfil his ministry 'in season and out of season'. Timothy might experience all sorts of uncertainties, but in view of God's certain plans for history, Paul urges him to seize opportunities for the gospel.

It may be that talk of 'seizing opportunities' seems misplaced when so many of us are experiencing weariness as we try to keep everything running whilst dealing with the ever-changing consequences of the pandemic. Yet I do think that despite all the challenges this is a time of opportunity. When Paul was in prison, he wrote to the Philippians 'I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.' Adversity often seems to be an environment for gospel growth. It is in our weakness that God's strength is made known.

So what are our current opportunities? Here are some which a number of you have been mentioning to me over the past couple of months:

- A renewed sense of the importance of fellowship. As people have returned to church, we've freshly realised the importance of the instruction in Hebrews 10.25 not to neglect to meet together for encouragement. Many of us have gained energy as a result.
- A renewed commitment to outreach. To some extent this has been forced on us. Many youth groups are having to start again, sometimes from scratch. Time and again online evangelistic courses and enquirers groups have proved successful – and we're now needing to build these into our programmes.
- A renewal of care for each other. Some people are still so nervous about physically returning to church that we're having to devote more time to organising pastoral visits.
- A new focus on faithfulness rather than success. Numbers attending services are important, but they clearly no longer encapsulate the number who benefit from online ministry. Prayer meetings in particular have gained more participation for being online.

We are, of course, approaching a season of opportunity for the gospel in all our Christmas activity whether it's mask-bound or not. However, my purpose in drawing attention to these opportunities is not to try to exhort us all to put tiredness to one side and make an extra effort. It is simply to encourage us to trust in the sovereign purposes of God, who 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.' (Romans 4.17 ESV) God is the One who gives us opportunity and creates growth. He is also the One who sustains us and gives us strength.

So despite present challenges, let's thank God for the opportunities He gives us and the certain future He promises, remembering Christ's appearing and kingdom as we embark on our Christmas programmes.

With love in Christ,

Rod

Co-workers

Co-workers is a new network of complementarian women in Anglican ministry in the UK, which launched in October 2021, under the auspices of the Bishop of Maidstone. So far, around 120 women have joined the network, through our email list, FaceBook group and survey.

A number of peer support groups are being established, as well as mentoring partnerships. We are hoping to offer our first webinar next term. There are plans for network meet-ups at the Regional Conferences in 2022 and other informal opportunities to meet with each other as well as with Bishop Rod and some of his staff.



The impetus for this new network came out of a recent report produced by Dr Kirsten Birkett for Bishop Rod, which showed that many women serving in complementarian churches struggle with lack of appropriate training and support. It is not always easy to find like-minded women in similar situations who can offer wisdom and experience. For women in the early stages of ministry it can be particularly hard to find suitable opportunities for training and employment.

Our goal in the *Co-workers* network is to help each woman find the information, resources and peer group support that will help her ministry flourish and the whole church to grow. *Co-workers* is led by Dr Ros Clarke, Associate Director of Church Society, and you can contact her directly for more information on co-workers@bishopofmaidstone.org.

[Sign up](#) for the email newsletters. [Join](#) the Facebook group. [Take](#) the survey.

Progress from the Bishop's Working Group

In the July newsletter, we announced that Bishop Rod was bringing together a Working Group to develop ways of helping parishes respond to some of the cultural issues we face. The Working Group has been working on a number of different strands:

1. Co-workers

In light of the concerns raised by Dr Kirsten Birkett in her recent research ([available here](#)), the *Co-workers* initiative was launched in October (see above). Bishop Rod very much hopes that all complementarian women in Anglican ministry will benefit from involvement in *Co-workers*, and asks that all those receiving this newsletter ensure that invitations to be involved are passed along as quickly as possible to all complementarian women in Anglican ministry.

2. CEEC Culture Review Questions

The Church of England Evangelical Council has produced an excellent series of Culture Review Questions, which will be available shortly. Bishop Rod commends these to all resolution parishes and asks that, if they have not already undertaken a full culture review in 2021, they undertake to engage fully with these Culture Review questions at PCC level in 2022.

3. Areas of concern specific to resolution parishes

Bishop Rod is considering asking all resolution parishes under his pastoral care to make a number of commitments in light of the 31.8 recent reports and other ongoing concerns. In particular, the Working Group has been looking at issues such as being transparent about having passed a resolution, developing positive relationships with diocesan officials, ensuring that opportunities for people to 'speak up' about concerns are made clear and obvious, and making sure that everyone (and especially women) is treated with honour.

4. Resources for Resolution Parishes

We are conscious that many parishes are struggling to produce specific policies, and would benefit from being able to see examples of what other churches have done. To that end, the Working Group is considering whether the Bishop's Office might be able to operate a 'clearing-house' of examples of policies and practice from resolution parishes, perhaps via a password-protected section of the website.

5. Clarifications about complementarianism and resolution parishes

It is clear that there are still some significant misunderstandings and misconceptions within the wider Church of England, both about complementarianism itself and about the specifics of the House of Bishop's Declaration. To that end, the Working Group is recommending the Bishop seek

to write a number of clarifying letters and documents, which will hopefully be completed by Christmas.

Rod will shortly be in touch with clergy in resolution parishes, asking them to engage – along with their PCCs – with the recommendations of the Working Group. In the meantime, any concerns or suggestions are welcomed, either directly to Bishop Rod or via his Chaplain.

LLF: Letter from a faithful brother

Bishop Rod was recently passed a moving, but anonymous, letter from someone he assumes is a faithful brother, where permission had been given to publish it. The writer described himself as one who experienced same-sex attraction. It is a letter that Rod is sure many churches would want to respond to with love and concern. Many of them have already taken steps to support same-sex attracted people who seek to live faithfully under Scripture.

The letter itself is rather too long for this newsletter, but the extracts below do highlight some of the pastoral needs which can go unaddressed as we engage in the LLF process through teaching and discussion in our churches – and they are included here not to generate debate but to encourage us to think about how best to address them and pray about them:

‘Sometimes, listening to the wider debate between conservatives and liberals makes me feel like the child of parents who are heading to a bitter divorce, and where neither of them wants custody of the children.

‘Conservative evangelical Church leaders present this as a point of doctrine, and the upholding of Scriptural authority. And it is. But for some of us it is also a deeply personal one. I long to hear leaders speak with clarity, conviction and love about the pastoral needs of same-sex attracted people who are committed to celibacy, with the same conviction and energy with which they speak about the doctrinal point.

‘I am not overstating how it feels to me when I say that if we leave the Church of England, it would feel like it was my fault. This is not a doctrinal problem for me, to be overcome with logical argument, or even careful Biblical exposition.

‘I experience same-sex attraction, and am committed to celibacy as the proper response to what I see as the unequivocal position of Scriptural teaching. I am also often very, very unhappy, indescribably lonely, and in constant, deep fear of what those who sit next to me at church would think if they knew. That fear is sufficiently great that there have been times when I have walked in to church, and walked straight out again and gone home, weeping.’

Many of us will be very conscious of how much we owe to those who openly talk both about their commitment to the Bible’s teaching on relationships and also the fact that they are same-sex attracted. It is, however, very helpful to be reminded that not everyone feels able to be so open, so that our teaching and leadership remain pastorally sensitive even when the issue isn’t presented openly in our churches.

Regional Meetings in 2022

The venues and dates for the Regional Meetings in 2022 have now been arranged, and we are expecting to be able to meet face-to-face once more. These Regional Meetings are open to all in leadership (both lay and ordained) of resolution parishes. Church of England clergy who are sympathetic to the complementarian theological position, but are not themselves in resolution parishes, are also very welcome.

We are planning five Regional Meetings, with each one running from 10am to 4pm. If possible, please register for the venue recommended for your diocese. If this isn't possible, please feel free to register for whichever is most convenient.

- **in London, on Thursday 12th May** – this is particularly for those in the Dioceses of Canterbury, Chichester, Guildford, London, Portsmouth, Rochester, and Southwark [[register here for 12th May in London](#)].
- **in Bristol, on Tuesday 17th May** – this is particularly for those in the Dioceses of Bath & Wells, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, Hereford, Salisbury, Truro, and Winchester [[register here for 17th May in Bristol](#)].
- **in Leicester, on Thursday 19th May** – this is particularly for those in the Dioceses of Birmingham, Coventry, Derby, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Peterborough, Southwell & Notts, and Worcester [[register here for 19th May in Leicester](#)].
- **in London, on Thursday 9th June** – this is particularly for those in the Dioceses of Chelmsford, Ely, Europe, Norwich, Oxford, St Albans, and St Eds & Ips [[register here for 9th June in London](#)].
- **in Manchester, on Wednesday 15th June** – this is particularly for those in the Dioceses of Blackburn, Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and York [[register here for 15th June in Manchester](#)].

Registration is now open, so please register via the links above as soon as possible.

Bishop's Coffee Breaks

Rod has enjoyed the opportunity to meet informally with various clergy in the online *Coffee Breaks* in 2021, and the feedback has been generally positive. We are therefore planning further *Coffee Breaks* in 2022, and these are open to all complementarian clergy with active congregational responsibilities in the Church of England.

The intention is for these *Coffee Breaks* to be one way of enabling Bishop Rod to be more accessible to clergy in 'resolution parishes'. The idea is to meet online (via Zoom) for a coffee and a catch-up, to look at the Bible and pray together, and also offer an opportunity to ask any questions or raise any issues that you would like to talk through with Rod.

The planned dates for January and February 2022 are:

- Tuesday 25th January, at 2pm (till 3pm)
- Wednesday 2nd February, at 2pm (till 3pm)

[Booking is now possible via Eventbrite](#). If you have any questions about any of this, or are uncertain about whether these are for you, please feel free to contact [the Bishop's Chaplain](#).

'Is Church of England ministry for me?' Saturday 29th January 2022, at Oak Hill College

Jesus told his disciples, “the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest”. (Matthew 9:37-38)

As it was then – so it is now! The tremendous gospel opportunities in and through the Church of England, alongside the present complexities and challenges raise all kinds of hopes and concerns, questions and even obstacles in the minds of many Bible-believing potential gospel ministers.

For the last 5 years Oak Hill College has been holding an annual Saturday morning conference, for those considering Church of England ministry, specifically designed to explore, engage with, and address both the opportunities and the concerns and questions. It provides an excellent forum to think through and discuss them from both theological and practical viewpoints.

The next such conference is on Saturday 29th January 2022 at Oak Hill, with the option of joining live via Zoom for those who can't make it in person. Bishop Rod will be one of the speakers.



Are you considering gospel ministry in the Church of England? Or might this be suitable for any folk in your congregation? Would you be willing to advertise it or pass on information about the event to any who you might want to encourage to consider full time ministry?

More details and the booking form can be found [on the Oak Hill website](#).

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

The Bishop's Five Year Review, published last year and [available here](#), identified six priorities for this quinquennium (ie 2020-2025). Here is a brief update on progress:

1. Active encouragement of the complementarian ministry of women

The *Co-workers* initiative has now been launched.

The Bishop is still hoping to appoint a female Pastoral Adviser, particularly to support women in ministry. Rod would be delighted to receive suggestions for this 1 day/week appointment. [NB. Some suggestions have already been followed up, but sadly have not resulted in an appointment.]

2. Development of a sustainable pattern of pastoral care

The Bishop's Working Group is continuing to process issues of concern to arise out of the 31.8 reports, and from the Birkett research from earlier this year.

The ongoing *Coffee Breaks* are opportunities for clergy in resolution parishes to receive additional pastoral care and support, as required.

The Regional Meetings are now on an annual basis, and will be face-to-face in 2022 after being on-line in 2021. Further details, and registration links for the Regional Meetings, are available above.

In his recent report to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rod identified 18 different significant pastoral situations in which he has been engaged as Bishop of Maidstone. ['Significant' in this context means that the Bishop was involved for more than one month.]

The Pastoral Advisers, David Banting in the north and Dick Farr in the south, continue to be involved in a wide variety of work, supporting local clergy and advising the Bishop accordingly.

3. Promotion of excellent and affordable training opportunities for ordinands

Bishop Rod continues to be actively involved in a number of conversations with individuals exploring opportunities for training.

Rod has been invited to speak at *ReNew's Future Leaders Conference* (14-16 Jan, at Woodland Grange).

Rod and Mark will both be involved in Oak Hill's *Is Church of England ministry for me?* event (29 Jan, at Oak Hill).

4. Promotion of senior leadership

In discussion initiated by the Bishop of Ely, the Bishop of Maidstone has been urging consideration of a restructuring of episcopal care for complementarian clergy, to enable more regional provision with better access to advice and diocesan support.

5. Engagement with church planting programmes

Bishop Rod continues to encourage evangelicals considering setting up BMOs, including a new church plant in Warrington.

6. Resolution on issues of controversy

Bishop Rod remains actively engaged on the *LLF Next Steps Group*.

Case Studies from Resolution Churches

From time to time Bishop Rod hears of clergy who believe that there might be a growing desire within their PCCs to pass a resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration, but who aren't quite sure what to say to their PCCs about the likely consequences of doing so. As a result, we have asked four clergy from different 'Resolution' churches to write very briefly about their experience over the last few years. These case studies have been attached, as a separate document, to this newsletter.

If you know a clergy colleague who might be in the position described above (possibly a member of your regional Renew Group), it would be tremendously helpful if you could pass the Case Study document on to them. If they would like further advice, they should [contact the Revd Mark Wallace](#), the Bishop's Senior Chaplain, in the first instance.

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 to do with the Bishop's Diary should be directed to [Rachel Lickiss](#).

Ordinations

If you are considering asking for an ordination to be taken by Bishop Rod in 2022 and have not yet contacted us, please contact [Rachel Lickiss](#) as soon as possible.

Ministerial Development Reviews

Bishop Rod has now carried out MDRs in several dioceses (eg Carlisle, Liverpool, London, Oxford, Rochester, and Sheffield), and the number has increased significantly in the last few months.

"The sustained and genuinely pastoral nature of Rod's oversight, and his understanding of St Peter's Church, meant that we could hit the ground running. Where previous Reviews have been superficial and task-oriented resulting in 'off the shelf' recommendations, with Rod I felt that there was a genuine and personal connection which led to more openness, honesty and, therefore, a helpful and realistic plan of action." Mike Warren (Diocese of Rochester)

Anyone who would like to explore the possibility of having their MDR with Bishop Rod or a member of his team should, in the first instance, contact [Rachel Lickiss](#).

Vacancies & Curacy Opportunities

Please continue to let [Rachel Lickiss](#) know if you would like her to circulate details of vacancies to resolution church incumbents for dissemination.

We are also aware of ordinands looking for title posts in the coming year, so do get in touch if you have a curacy to fill.

Bishop's Staff Team & Contact Details

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Prayer Requests

Please give thanks to God for:

- the successful launch of the *Co-workers* network and for its widespread take-up by women in ministry roles;
- opportunities to encourage people to consider training for ordination in the Church of England;
- the progress being made in gaining a BMO for the new church plant in Warrington.

Please pray that:

- the Bishop's Working Group will identify steps that will be a real help to parishes as they assess the health of their church cultures;
- the planning process for the 2022 regional meetings will go well – and that we will be able to meet physically;
- Bishop Rod's engagement in the LLF Next Steps Group will be significant in helping the Church be faithful both in its pastoral provision and its doctrine of marriage.

List of Resolution Parishes (as of 12th November July 2021, 146 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, Kensington
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

Newcastle

Elswick Parish Church

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

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