

## Fresh Starts, Farewells, Back to Normal?

October looks like an interesting month for our diocese. Sarah Brown to be installed as Dean of Hereford, Alison Myers as Warden of Launde Abbey, the first face-to-face meeting of rural deans and senior staff for two years, confirmation services starting up again, Gordon Steele's farewell service – and much else.

So are we back to normal? I don't think we'll ever go back to life as it was before covid, nor should we. Whatever you think of the lockdowns, the mask-wearing, the school closures, the self-isolation and the "pinging", the arguments over preparedness and then over vaccination; whether you think the whole exercise was a massive over-reaction, or that this summer was far too early to lift most restrictions; the pandemic has had a massive and permanent effect on our national life, and we cannot ignore that.

We haven't seen the last of mask-wearing. Our link diocese of Seoul in South Korea demonstrates that. The far east saw a severe outbreak of SARS twenty years ago, and mask-wearing became the rule for a couple of years. When I last visited, 15 years after masks ceased to be compulsory, significant numbers of people were still wearing them in crowded places. In some cases that was because of pollution, but the reality

is that mask-wearing in public has become a fairly common occurrence in the east. On the other hand, in the west, the covid pandemic seems to have exaggerated culture gaps and reduced politeness

and tolerance. People can get so very heated over the pro- and anti-vaxxing argument, even more so than over Brexit not so long ago.

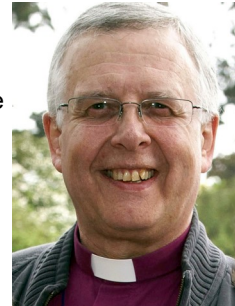
We haven't seen the last of zoom and other online meetings. At the very least, I find myself doing one-to-one zoom chats rather than phone calls, and rather than driving an hour each way for a one-hour meeting. On the other hand, I now have to go to London for House of Lords debates, and can no longer participate via zoom (which I did for the emergency Afghanistan debate in mid-August).

As church, we are returning carefully, conscious of the possibility of a fourth wave this autumn and winter. We are going back, but to a new normal.

With best wishes



+Donald  
Bishop of Peterborough



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