

12.03.2021



Dear friends

Mothering Sunday

Mothering Sunday is one of those days that can bring a variety of emotions, joy and sorrow, thankfulness and sadness for a variety of reasons for different people. Here at Abington, we would like to acknowledge and recognise all of that around Mothering Sunday and bring it to God in prayer and worship. We want to remember and give thanks for not only biological mothers but also all those who showed and is showing a motherly love, care and comfort to her family, friends and neighbours.

If you know anyone who was or is like a mother to you or to anyone, who shows that care and love to others, then please do send the photos of them to me so that I can put them all together as a video and share it at the end of the service. Thank you to those who already sent me their photos. If you haven't yet, then you can still send them to me by tomorrow morning.

I will also include some of the family photographs that we received last year. I hope that is okay with you all. We will of course have some other contents contributed by our Guides and Mothers' Union.

Covid in Northampton, March 2021

Bob, our vice-chair of the PCC, is a geologist and is very much involved in matters in the community. He has been following the data regarding the coronavirus situation in Northampton very closely. The following is his message to us regarding where we stand with Covid at this moment. I hope you will find this information helpful. Thank you, Bob.

I have been following the Northampton COVID rate over the past six months - the geographer in me likes to plot a daily graph - and it is encouraging to see that the town's COVID rate which was as high as 917/100k on 7th January is now below 100/ 100k people for the first time since October last year.

(Seven-day rates are expressed per 100,000 population and are calculated by dividing the seven-day count by the area population and multiplying by 100,000.)

Over the last 6 weeks the level has come down very steeply and, as I write, Northampton's rate is now 80 /100k though is still significantly higher than the national average figure of 50/100k.

This shows that the lockdown has been very effective in reducing the rate, but still, our local rate is reducing more slowly than in most of the country. No doubt vaccination is effective on slowing the spread. Yet, why is Northampton's rate stubbornly high? I think the number of food-packing plants and distribution centres and some continuing presence in our care homes is playing apart in maintaining the town's higher than average levels.

Very locally the figures are more encouraging with fewer than 3 cases in the Abington area and just 3 cases in Abington Vale.

So there are ground for encouragement but I think it would be good to see our local rate even lower before lockdown is relaxed much further. *Bob Purser, 11 March 2021*

Reporting antisocial behaviour issues around Abington Park

Abington Park is loved by all of us and a great place for many kinds of activities. Sometimes though there are antisocial behaviours such as drug issues going which cause concerns for the community. I have been involved in the Abington Park Management Committee, representing the church in the park and those issues have been a growing concern in the committee. One of the challenges is that you don't always get a prompt response from the Police when you report those issues.

Recently, Sgt. Steve Bedford, who is in charge of Abington area, explained to the committee how things could improve and what challenges are there. As you may well know, the Police is now run very much like businesses and their resources are quite limited. According to him, the best way that could lead to increased and improved reaction from the Police is to keep reporting those issues to the Police. Even when those reports don't get an immediate response due to lack of resources, those reports will be counted and will be used by Steve to ask for more resources in the future. According to him, the more reports we make, the more resources he can get for his work around Abington.

He assured us that the park is part of the daily patrol area. There has been a big increase in reporting regarding breaches of Covid regulations but not so many reports regarding issues

over drug dealing or antisocial behaviour. If you happen to see any of those issues happening around the park, please make a report to the Police; 101 for non-emergencies and 999 for emergencies.

Bishop's Letter

Bishop Donald wrote again to a wider group of people in the Diocese which I am sharing with you below.

Dear friends

Greetings to you all, as we continue through what some have described as the longest Lent ever. I hope you are well, and seeing new life at the end of the dark tunnel. The Lent/Easter analogy is interesting, as the new life of Easter is a transformed life: the same person, but different. And the even greater new life towards which Easter points is transformed yet again: the same person, but a new resurrection body, imperishable, immortal, glorious. Life after lockdown will also be different, and that must include church life. Christians never look back to a golden age. The best is yet to be. We look forward to post-covid life, post-covid society, post-covid church; they will and should be different from pre-covid.

A reminder to the great majority of those receiving this, that since the covid crisis hit us I have also been writing a weekly bulletin to the licensed clergy. There is nothing secret about that, and anyone interested can find the back numbers here on our website.

Bishop John

As many of you know, Bishop John was poorly with covid for a couple of months last spring. In the autumn he was hit by "long covid" (now officially renamed "post-covid syndrome" though I suspect the old name will stick). He was unwell in October, then off work through November, December and January. He has now been returning gradually for about six weeks. I am glad to report that he is recovering, albeit slowly. He and I both hope that he will be fully back to work by Easter.

Planning ahead

John and I have been discussing with senior colleagues the diocesan emergence from lockdown, and much of the rest of this letter reflects our conclusions. Please bear two things in mind. First, each parish or benefice has to make its own decisions in the light of government

regulations and guidelines, and bearing in mind the local context. Parishes have my permission to suspend public worship, as long as they inform me, and to resume that within the covid regulations, again informing me via my PA Joanne Gibson.

Second, much of what follows is tentative. We are making assumptions about the progress of the pandemic. We assume that the vaccine rollout will be successful, with all adults offered two doses by October, and being fully protected by November. We assume that there will continue to be restrictions to indoor gatherings, such as face coverings and distancing, for the whole of this year. We assume that new variants of the virus, and any third wave of the pandemic, will be held in check to a significant extent by the vaccines. If any of those assumptions is wrong, or if the situation changes unexpectedly, we may have to change our plans.

Licensing of Lay Ministers / Celebration of Lay Ministry

Lay Ministers do a two-year training course, as opposed to three years for Readers. Normally we have a day for all lay ministers in the Cathedral in late September, which includes the licensing of those newly trained, as well as worship, teaching, and fellowship. Sadly, we cannot plan for a fairly full Cathedral in September, so, as last year, I will licence the new lay ministers on the planned date, Saturday 25 September, but in a Zoom service.

I hope we can arrange some form of online gathering, with teaching and encouragement, for as many lay ministers as can manage it, also on that last Saturday of September, but I am afraid we cannot all meet in the Cathedral, and I can't invite all the lay ministers to refreshments beforehand in the Bishop's Palace, as I normally would.

I am very conscious that the 2020 and 2021 cohorts of new lay ministers will have missed their big day in the Cathedral. My intention is to put that right in 2022. Keep the date of Saturday 24 September 2022 in your diary, and watch this space.

Bishops' Visits

As bishops, we are trying to follow the best advice so as not to be carriers of the virus, especially as we usually travel around so much. Hopefully we will each have received two doses of the vaccine, followed by a three-week gap, before the ordinations at the end of June. All adults should have been offered their first dose by the end of July, and their second by October.

Until October we will prioritise online worship. We hope that most parishes or benefices will continue to offer this, to ensure that the vulnerable and the fearful can take part in worship. I

have done a number of live online services and sermons, and both John and I are happy to be booked up for those. Please book us via our PAs, Suzanne Carter for Bishop John or Joanne Gibson for me. We will continue to offer some Sundays for this ministry long-term, as we think that the church post-covid needs to be online as well as meeting in our buildings.

Catch-up Confirmations

From mid-October we want to concentrate on catching up with confirmations. By then it will be 18 months since our last confirmation, and we very much want to rectify that. I have asked each Rural Dean to organise one or more Sunday afternoon deanery confirmations between mid-October and mid-December. Bishop John and I, together with our honorary assistant bishops Andrew and Ed, will cover those between us. I don't normally like deanery confirmations, much preferring to confirm even just one or two candidates in their own parishes on Sunday mornings, but this is the right thing to do this year, rather than keeping candidates waiting longer than necessary.

2022

Next year Bishop John and I hope to be available for Sunday parish visits. We aren't taking bookings yet, and we will each continue to keep at least one Sunday free each month for online services. Once we have this year sorted out, and the future landscape is a bit clearer, we will let the clergy know and open bookings for next year.

Rumours and Lies

Some have been disturbed by recent articles in the media about "the Church of England" making clergy and lay staff redundant, abolishing the parish system, and what have you.

There is probably no point in saying that legally there is no such body as the Church of England. Clergy are appointed by and accountable to the Diocesan Bishop, lay staff are appointed by and accountable to the Diocesan Board of Finance. Changes to parishes are a matter for the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. The "Church of England" doesn't come into it. In this diocese, we have no plans or intentions to make any clergy or lay staff redundant, and we continue to believe strongly in the parish system. If you choose to read opinion columns in the media (as I do) please treat them as opinion, not fact.

Fact: we are not planning redundancies, but the covid crisis has clearly affected our finances, and this year as a diocese we are freezing the pay of our clergy and lay staff. I'm sad that we can't give a pay rise, but that decision is proportionate and prudent. Looking ahead, we do

need to encourage more worshippers (in church buildings or online) to give generously and even sacrificially as part of their life of discipleship.

Singing

You may be aware that there was a lot of research last year about the dangers of singing in spreading the coronavirus. Sadly, the conclusions seem to indicate that there is a greater danger than many imagined. For that reason, the regulations linked to the current lockdown, announced in early January, made clear that when a congregation was present only one person could sing, well distanced from the rest of the people, and only if that was essential for the worship (which is never the case in the Church of England). The same applies indoors or outdoors. Recorded music can be used, and singing can be livestreamed (all obeying appropriate copyright laws). As yet, the roadmap for relaxing lockdown does not indicate any more permission for singing to take place, and there are no suggestions that this might be relaxed for Holy Week or Easter. Hopefully, a little further ahead, I will be able to give better news on this.

And finally ...

I am so grateful to all of you (this letter goes to over 1200 people!) for your faithful work, ministry, and flexibility over this last year. We never know fully what we are signing up to in any role in life or in the church or kingdom, but it is absolutely certain that none of us predicted anything like this. Nevertheless, we have not just been passive, letting it happen around us. I have been so thrilled at the way that many parishes, chaplaincies, and other ministry contexts, have stepped up and found new ways of being Christ's people: in worship, fellowship and service. Thank you.

Bishop Donald, 7 March 2021

That is all from me for now. I hope you have a lovely weekend. I look forward to being with you on Mothering Sunday. May God bless you and all your loved ones.

With love in Christ

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