



4th November 2020

Dear Friends,

Transforming Church

Discovering how to be a better church for everyone

I wanted to be in touch with you about a positive development in the life of the Diocese next year as we seek together what Christ is calling us to be and to do in the coming years.

I recognise that this good news lands at a moment when once again we are moving into lockdown because of the rapidly increasing rate of infection and hospital admissions. Having been in touch with Directors of Public Health in both Bristol and South Gloucestershire last week I was not surprised at the announcement by our government of a change of policy and guidance. I am very well aware that the implications for you and your families will be hard to bear, and the impact on your churches and communities will be considerable. I also know that you will be amongst the first to support those in need: those who are afraid, those who cannot cope, those who have lost jobs, those who are hungry. Thank you for your persistent faithfulness and the deep generosity of your service.

During this lockdown churches can stay open for prayer, and for filming broadcast worship. That is good, and I know you will take advantage of this to continue to enable your church, by your prayer and your service, to be a sign of hope. Covid-19 is a ghastly virus which kills the most vulnerable and wearies us all. It has challenged the church and it has roused us to respond in new ways. Your adaptability over the last eight months has been extraordinary and wonderful. I thank God for each of you.

I also recognise that we will all be under pressure through the coming weeks, and we will have to continue to learn to live with Covid-19 for some time. Advent and Christmas will be very different this year as we seek to reveal the light of Christ in these particularly dark times.

In the midst of all of this, it is clear that we must make time to reach towards the future God in Christ desires for us all. We are now beginning a process to seek together what Christ is calling us to be and to do in the coming years. In January we will begin a conversation to help shape a new vision, listening to and talking with lots of different people, both within the church and outside - with communities, congregations, clergy, lay ministers and church leaders. There will be opportunities for everyone to get involved. Good conversations need great listening and I am committed to listening to voices that I don't often hear and opinions that challenge me and the status quo.

This work begins in a complex world that is experiencing seismic changes. Covid-19, Brexit, racism, growing inequalities, climate crisis, ongoing digital revolution, approaching recession and debates over human identity are disrupting and changing society and communities. At the same time, we know that numbers of regular worshipers are declining and the role of the Church of England in wider society is contested more now than it has been in recent history. The process of shaping our vision and priorities for the coming years will allow us to celebrate the best of what is, imagine what could be and co-create what should be in all the surrounding complexity.

I look forward to working with you throughout the coming year as we seek our calling as God's people in this place and in this time. I will lead this process with the support and guidance of the Bishop's staff team, a project board and delivery team which will be accountable to Bishop's Council. The Diocese has been awarded some additional finance to support us in this task. That will release the Archdeacons to spend more time in conversation, thinking, praying, and planning with as many people as possible. They will work with others in a structured review of our mission. Together with you we will seek to interpret what we are hearing in Christ's call.

As Bishop of Bristol I am called to be the Bishop for everyone. As Anglicans, as the Church of England, we are called to be a church for everyone. This remains at the core of all that we do and means we must be relentlessly inclusive in our approach, reaching out to everyone in our diocese.

Christ is ahead of us in this task and challenge. Our faithfulness calls us to respond with hope and support each other with joyful anticipation,

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Faull', with a small cross symbol to the left.

Rt Revd Vivienne Faull
Bishop of Bristol