

**Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District**

**Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse**

**December 2020**

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am aware that this is the last pastoral letter that I shall write in this calendar year of 2020 – a year that many of us will want to erase from our memory in view of the significant challenges we have all faced through the viral pandemic of COVID -19. As we approach the turning of the year there are hopeful prospects that vaccine development will begin to offer us a way out of the world-wide crisis and that by the time we reach the Spring of 2021 there may be some semblance of normality even if it is a *new* normality! All of this is to be welcomed particularly in the season of Advent when as people of faith our discipleship is expressed through hope-filled waiting. We are a people who, once more, are willing to entrust themselves to the hope-filled promises of the living God who chooses to abide with us in the coming of Christ. Christ comes to be God with us – the light and grace of God abiding in our hopes and fears, our pain and suffering, our joy and sorrow and ultimately our life and death.

Hope is such a profound and vital virtue that sustains our human experience and enables us to face the challenges of each new day. Hope enabled Terry Waite to endure the four long years of captivity as a hostage in Lebanon all those years ago. A vision of hope sustains the Old Testament Prophets in the harsh realities of their historical context as they await the coming of the day of the Lord. Hope is what spurred millions of American citizens to exercise their democratic right and vote in the Presidential elections of November 2020. Hope will sustain our post COVID existence as we emerge from this crisis and grapple with the economic, social, and political consequences of what we have passed through.

I do hope and pray that as you journey through Advent and prepare to celebrate the story of Christmas that you will find room in your hearts to embrace the gift of hope – a hope that is grounded in the gracious overtures of God's love in the coming of the Christ child. This is the architect of the Universe, the great lover of Creation, immersing himself in flesh and blood and in doing so, transforming our lives for the gift of receiving eternity. This hope refutes the finality of suffering and death as we embrace the gift of sharing in the life of the Risen Christ and it offers us a future as we entrust ourselves to the providential care of a faithful God who will not let us go. Through our faithful observance of Advent and our joyful celebration of Christmas; we can relocate our life and existence in the story of God's great love for humankind and all Creation.

*Peace and Blessing, Julian*