

March 2020

Lay Ministry Matters

GREETINGS TO YOU ALL,

If anyone in your churches has said to you on Shrove Tuesday that they were giving up Sunday worship and all church meetings for Lent, you would have either assumed they were joking, or wanted to meet them for a coffee to see what was troubling them.

None of us, even back 3 weeks ago, would have imagined the current situation. The Diocesan Office is closed except for a very small group of colleagues, and the majority of us (including all the Formation & Ministry Team) have been sent home with the necessary technology to work from home. This letter will begin on my dining room table, go to Tricia to proof read on her dining room table, and if you are not online and read as a paper copy that will come out of the Diocesan Office and probably be printed by Suzanne Rogers.



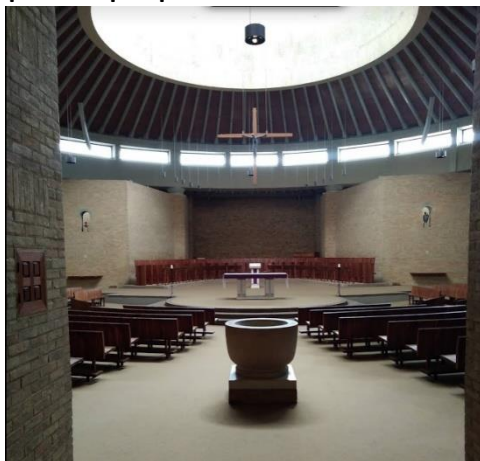
Since I have access to the databases I know that many of you reading this will either have begun self-isolation, or be doing so from the weekend. For those of you who live alone, and for whom the church family are your significant others, you might well be wondering what on earth this “radically different kind of church” which our Archbishops have called us to be, will look like.

I’m not 70 and am in good health, but my husband has some of the ‘underlying health conditions’ which mean he has to self isolate, and in turn that means I need to be very careful and follow social distancing instructions very carefully when I have to go out to buy food.

The hardest thing is that none of us knows how long it will go on for, and our diaries have emptied, and we are used to our ministry, especially pastoral ministry, being very people focussed. Pastoral Assistants and Anna Chaplains and Friends are very aware of how lonely many of the people they visit will be, and only some of them will be connected digitally. For Lay Ministers who are used to meeting with many people in the course of a week, the prospect for themselves of being lonely in self isolation may be very real. Yesterday's Morning Prayer Psalm was Psalm 38, and verse 11 struck me more than ever before.

Last weekend I had the privilege of being at Worth Abbey, along with Bishop James and Chris Dench, on the retreat weekend for LLMs in training who are due for licensing this year. As ever it was a privilege to get to know them, to hear about how God has called them so far and the variety of things they are involved in, in their churches and communities and workplaces. After meeting each of them one to one, Bishop James told them on Saturday night that he was looking forward to licensing them, and he *hoped* this would still be able to happen on May 16th, though we couldn't be sure.

Three days later we now know that there is no possibility of this happening in the Cathedral, and since it is a gathering, which cannot happen, simply changing the venue will not help. Please pray for this cohort as we work out the best plan B or perhaps plan C for their licensing.



If you have ever been to Worth Abbey you will recognise the church (above) and joined the monks for their offices. We only joined them at 7.30am, 1pm and 6.45pm, but there was something very powerful about being present in their prayer and worship, and knowing that whatever was going on in the world, these men were stopping, and gathering, and praying. Of course, I don't know if they are still gathering now, but they will still be praying, and if

you have thought about establishing a Rhythm of Life, but not really gone beyond thinking about it, this could be the perfect opportunity to try. In fact you might be able to suggest this to your congregation – at least those who can join a group digitally or by WhatsApp.

I have felt challenged to spend more time praying for people – not least all of you, and those of you who I know have individual needs for prayer. I hope that you already have prayer support in your parishes, but if you are feeling in need of prayer or a phone chat, please get in touch with me or one of the deputy wardens.

These are their contact details, in case you have forgotten:

BROMLEY & BEXLEY ARCHDEACONRY:

Miriam Giles 020 8303 5868 miriamgiles35@outlook.com
Mark Newman 01959 540482 marknewman1955@gmail.com

ROCHESTER ARCHDEACONRY:

Val Butler 01634 311979 val.a.butler@googlemail.com
Vic Twine 01474 351502 victortwine@blueyonder.co.uk

TONBRIDGE ARCHDEACONRY:

Hilary Sutton 01892 834090 hilary.sutton1@btopenworld.com
Allan Jonnes 01892 528502 allan.jonnes@btinternet.com

With my prayers and best wishes for you all in whatever this new season holds for us,



RESOURCES

if you haven't yet checked out the new Transforming Ministry website at

transformingministry.co.uk



do have a look! In my January letter I mentioned the excellent 6 minute video about Lay Ministry featuring 4 people with very different contexts for their ministry. If you use social media you can now follow on Transforming Ministry on Facebook and Instagram pages and a Twitter feed.

SOCIAL MEDIA

If you have not used social media because the idea doesn't appeal, or you know how much time it can waste, can I respectfully suggest that now might be the time to try? The most efficient way for Jenny Ross to get updates from the National Church and from Bishopscourt out to us is via Facebook and Twitter. Anything important will obviously be followed up by an emailed letter, but the situation is clearly changing fast.



Many churches are already experimenting with keeping in touch digitally, and filming messages, prayers, or services (without congregations present) can be done with a smartphone on Facebook. This will be a good way to keep in touch with your own church and with other churches in your deanery, and our own diocese and Canterbury Diocese are working together on resources that will be accessible on Facebook.

SAFEGUARDING

All diocesan training has been cancelled for the foreseeable future, and that includes safeguarding training, so if you are booked to do the 2020 Leadership Module in the next couple of months this is not going to take place. I have already been asked where that leaves someone whose training expires in April or May.

The answer to that question is that since circumstances make it impossible and it is not your fault, you are not deemed to be failing to “Have due regard” to the regulations. If your course is cancelled Alison Jones from our safeguarding team will be in touch, and Tricia will compile a list of who you are – please let us know. In the meantime you are asked to repeat C0 and C1 online – these may have updated since you previously did them – and when you have completed these please let Tricia know.

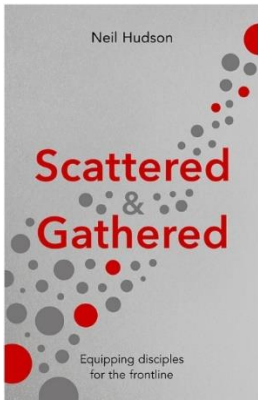
2020 LAY MINISTRY CONFERENCE

Is booked for 7th November 2020 – we really hope that normal service will be resumed by then, so please put it in your diary and try and come along.

Bishop James will be with us for the day. More details to follow.



PAST EVENTS



It was good to meet up with those of you who came to the Bishop's Study Day on 29th February at Christ Church Chislehurst. Bishop Simon hosted the day, and Neil Hudson spoke on the theme "Gathered and Scattered: fruitfulness in the whole of life." It was an inspiring day, and also offered some very practical things that ordinary church congregations can do to live that out in the reality of everyday life. If you want reading suggestions for this time Neil's book: *Scattered & Gathered: equipping disciples for the frontline* (IVP 2019) reflects all the learning that has happened working with churches over the past decade.

For the time being though, everyday life is looking very different and now is the time for us to reflect on what that means for life in self isolation and social distancing.

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES TRAINING

On 7th March, Stephen Ramshaw and I met with a very small but creative and committed group of people to talk about how we can better resource big events – the first of which was (at the time we met) The Sweeps Festival. Since then Sweeps has been cancelled, but our conversation was really useful, and I have since talked with Bishop James, and you will hear more in due course.



It was very definite from the replies I had from many of you that I am NOT the only Lay Minister in the diocese who doesn't get excited by Summer Fairs and Christmas Bazaars! So there will be an opportunity at our November conference with Bishop James to think about how we can make such events intentionally missional, rather than the same old formula to try and raise funds.

Church Army's DARE strategy has four objectives and Stephen and his Church Army colleagues in Rochester Archdeaconry will have lots of ideas to share – but between us we too will have plenty of ideas that have worked (and maybe some that haven't)

Doing evangelism
Advocating evangelism
Resourcing evangelism
Enabling evangelism



**Thank you ALL
for all you do,
as lay ministers.**

**May God equip you for whatever
you find you are called to do in
this new season of being church
which is full of unknowns.**

**May God bless you as you work
and pray to be a blessing to
others.**