



Easter 2021 Lay Ministry Matters

EASTER GREETINGS TO YOU ALL – CHRIST IS RISEN!

Many (but by no means all) churches are opening up for Easter. Some will wait a while longer, and a very few have quietly remained open since Christmas, but as we celebrate the resurrection this year we will never before have been unable to sing Easter hymns together or queued up at 2m spacings to receive Holy Communion from a priest in a facemask. Taking the opportunities for pastoral encounters with people after the service or engaging in conversation with someone who is new to church, will still not be permitted, and we'll have to wait much longer to be allowed to relax over a coffee with friends after the service. It will be Easter in church again, but not as we know it.

Lay Ministry in the Pandemic has been a mixture of experiences. Some of our number are no longer among us because they have died – of Covid or of other conditions but leaving families to grieve under Covid restrictions. Some of you have been bereaved, and as the world around looks forward to meeting up with families and loved ones, the pain of your grief may be hard to manage. Still others have had Covid, and whilst many have fully recovered, I know some of you are still struggling with the effects of long covid, unsure when you will regain your full energy and strength.

Some of you have learned new skills in the online world, and others have been able to meet the very real needs of your communities in involvement with foodbanks or supporting housebound parishioners. Many have found this last lockdown increasingly difficult, have had one or both jabs but still can't see loved ones, or feel increasingly insecure about leaving home even for permitted walks or essential trips. We have all heard that "It's OK not to be OK", but if you are struggling with mental health issues and are unable to pour out your feelings to your closest friends who you know would listen and hug you and pray for you, the online option feels a very poor substitute.

Some churches have said goodbye to much loved vicars by Zoom. Other parishes have welcomed new incumbents, who haven't met their congregations in person yet. And we all wonder what the church of the future will look like, and where we might fit into it.

It's not all bad news: how many of you were responsible for some aspect of church life which you had taken on when someone stopped/moved/got sick? So many of us take on extras like this because we are people who want to be helpful, and we tell ourselves it will only be for a few weeks until someone else offers.....



Resuming ministry after such a long time will be an opportunity to decide what our priorities are. What aspects of ministry make your heart sing? That's not to say that we aren't sometimes called to do hard things, but there is a difference between wrestling with a sermon but knowing you are called to preach and getting buried beneath admin when you know you are called to pastoral evangelism. When did you last look at your working agreement? Is it anything like the reality of your ministry, or of what you sense God is calling you to be and do?

This season of cautious new beginnings may be the perfect time for doing a Ministry Development Review. Some of you have done them this year and been extremely gracious with me when I have taken a very long time to respond – and now I am finally up to date I will be sending out paperwork to some more cohorts very soon.

Reviews are not designed to be an exam to check your competency, or a hoop to jump through before you can have your licence/authorisation/commission renewed. We designed the process as a means to review your ministry against your working agreement – and all of us have in common the fact that our working agreements have felt like a work of fiction over the past year. But we can still look back at what we expected we would be doing and see how we respond to the idea of resuming it... God may have new plans for you in his new look church, and this might be an opportunity to prayerfully ponder what they might be.

Lay Ministry Development Reviews are generally only sent to those still licensed, authorised, or commissioned, but for some of you with PTO there might be an even greater sense of uncertainty about what the future holds. All your Permissions from the Bishop are valid until next Pentecost, so we don't need to be looking at renewals this year, and Pentecost 2022 feels far enough away that surely things will have settled into the 'new normal' by then. Nevertheless, I will be writing again later in April to those of you with PTO, with some further thoughts for you as we look to the future.

ST BENEDICT'S CENTRE

St Benedict's Centre has been a special place for many Lay Ministers over the years, and most recently as somewhere to take a day out of the routine – to book a room and to relax, pray, read, walk, think... It is a frequent outcome of Lay Ministry Development Reviews – “to take time out, or have a quiet day”

We are delighted that St Benedict's Centre is now able to open again for individual day guests. Full risk precautions are in place. Guests will have their own room with facilities for making hot drinks. The Pilgrim Chapel is open for private prayer and guests may join the Abbey community for their offices during the day. The cost of a day is £10. If you would like to book, please contact Rev Jane Winter on bookings@stbenedictscentre.org

A warm welcome awaits you at the Centre.



THIS YEAR'S LICENSING.



We reluctantly had to cancel the residential retreat which has preceded the licensing of LLMs up to this year. This has been an opportunity for them to reflect on where God has led them through training, and what the next stage might be, and as part of that the LLMs have each had a 1:1 interview with Bishop James. This year everything was moved online,

and as this photo was taken on the Sunday morning and everyone was smiling – it went as well as possible. Please pray for the students being licensed in the Cathedral on May 15th, there will be a small number of people involved inside the building, but the service will be livestreamed, so look out for details of that nearer the time.

BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH

Jane Winter sent me an 8 page (easy read!) document on funerals and bereavement research. Those who have done recent funeral training are likely to have seen it, but this is important reading for all of us whether or not we personally conduct funerals:

The research was conducted online with 2008 people aged 18 to 75, 15-20th January 2021. The sample was representative of the England population by age and gender. The Church of England was not revealed as the sponsor of the research until specific questions relating to it were introduced in the latter part of the questionnaire. Since March 2020, many people have been impacted by:

DEATH: 6 in 10 experienced the death of at least one person*, 1 in 4 experienced more than one death* 4 in 10 experienced the death of someone close, 1 in 10 lost more than one close person.

RESTRICTED FUNERALS: 7 in 10 of those who experienced someone's death were not able to attend funerals. More than 8 in 10 agreed people haven't been able to say goodbye properly or fulfil funeral wishes.

You may have seen those statistics in the CofE's information for the National Day of Remembrance, but one of the findings I found most striking was

Only 44% thought that anyone could have a Church of England led funeral, and just 35% of those aged 18-29, and people were more likely to consider having a Church of England led funeral if they knew they could hold the service in the church building and the church actively welcomed people more.

We don't have to be authorised to conduct funerals to get the message out that our churches want to help people who are bereaved, whether or not they are regular churchgoers.

To read the report here is the link:

<https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Funerals-and-Bereavement-Research.pdf>



2021 DATES

Ethyln sends out emails about CMD opportunities, and we are hopeful that more of these will be able to happen in person as the year progresses, although there are advantages to Zooming, not least as roads get busier – there is no travel time to a Zoom course!

Lay Ministers in Rochester Archdeaconry should already know that the Archdeaconry Celebration of Lay Ministry planned for 22nd May has been put back to Saturday 7th August when we hope to be able to have a restriction free gathering in person. I will be in touch later this month with Rochester Lay Ministers who need their Licences/Authorisations/Commissions renewed.

The Diocesan Lay Ministry conference day with Bishop Simon on October 2nd should be in your diaries – and I very much hope we can meet in person. If that isn't possible there will be an online alternative, so please mark the date to your diary now.

Last week there was an opportunity for Lay Ministers in Bromley and Bexley Archdeaconry to meet together via Zoom, to worship and to catch up with each other. Massive thanks to Mark and Miriam for trying this. The time availability and strength of home wifi each of the Deputy Wardens have means we can't exactly replicate it across the archdeaconries, but we will think about what else might be possible.

DR COLIN BROWN RIP

Following yesterday's email regarding Colin's death last week, Tricia has his daughter's address and will pass it on to any of you who want to send a card. The funeral will be at 11am on Thursday 29 April. The cremation service will be live streamed and should be available to watch afterwards for a number of days. We don't have the link and code yet, but these will be available nearer the time- again, please ask Tricia or me.

GOODBYES

A number of Lay Ministers have moved away this year – Becky Clifford to the Kent Coast, Dot and Steve Brame to North Staffordshire, Glenis Squire to Devon, and David and Ann Smith to Swansea. They will be missed in the parishes, but we wish them well as they settle into new homes and communities.

AND FINALLY

Whether you are celebrating Easter with others in church, or continuing to isolate with internet, radio and TV options for Easter services, whether you will relate more easily to Good Friday or to Easter Sunday

**May Christ,
who out of defeat brings new hope and a new future,
fill us with his new life.**

With my prayers and best wishes for you all,

