Greetings to you all from a sunny rectory garden – as Formation & Ministry Team prepare to go back to working in the diocesan office.

My last letter to you all was written at Easter, as many of our churches opened for the first time in 2021. Some of course had remained open throughout the early months of the year because that was permitted, and now we are well into the second half of the year – with so many things having happened in that time.

The most significant of those events for us as a diocese, was saying our heartfelt thanks and sad goodbyes to Bishop James. His development and support of Lay Ministry has been unstinting, and it was no surprise that when the Service of Thanksgiving and Farewell in the Cathedral focussed on 5 areas of Diocesan life, Lay Ministry was one of those areas. (Along with community engagement and chaplaincy, vocations, diversity, and diocesan links.) I was pleased that Alan Mitchell was asked to reflect briefly on Lay Ministry. Alan is an LLM at St Augustine with St Luke Bromley Common, but like me he is also a trustee of the Central Readers’ Council, which provides us both with a wider view of how lay ministry operates in other dioceses – so we both know better than most how many reasons we must be thankful for Bishop James’ ministry.

The text of Alan’s talk is attached with this mailing for those who didn’t get to see the service online. The full service is still available to watch at https://www.facebook.com/996841963717071/videos/921766155047682
Every LLM who has been licensed since 2015 has met personally for a 1:1 discussion with Bishop James at our pre-licensing retreat, and they have spoken together of the way God has called the candidate, and how training and formation has changed them, and what are the passions and priorities of the almost licensed lay minister as they approach their licensing. This is not standard practice among dioceses.

My role remains unusual among dioceses too – Canon Law states that every Diocese should have a Warden of Readers, but in more than half of dioceses the Warden is part of the role of an Archdeacon, or a DDO, or a Suffragan Bishop, or occasionally a parish priest. I was the first employed (lay) Warden of Lay Ministry in the CoE back in 2014, but it is encouraging to see that there are others now, as lay ministry is gaining a greater national recognition in the CoE structures.

We now pray for the process of who will be our next Bishop. Last time there was a Vacancy-in-See, 11 years ago, I was the (volunteer) Warden of Readers, and I was invited to join a group of clergy who were meeting in the diocesan office with the Archbishop’s Appointment Secretary. I don’t remember it well, and I don’t think I made any radical suggestions!

I was encouraged though, that this time round I was asked to supply names of up to 8 Lay Ministers to meet (on Zoom) with the Appointment secretary. Choosing 8 people to represent all 3 Archdeaconries and the complete breadth of licensed and authorised lay ministries was a challenge, and of course not all could manage the date, but the feedback from those who did was very positive:

"I really felt that she was interested in what we were saying and was actually listening. We definitely got over the importance of lay ministry - many parishes wouldn't survive without lay ministry and during interregnums we keep our churches going"

"I think we gave a good insight into the work we do and how far the diocese has come with regard to lay ministry, under Bishop James."

"I think we got the message across loud and clear that we are looking for someone to carry on Bishop James’ good work with lay ministry!"

If you want to make any comments or recommendations to the Archbishops’ Secretary – she is happy to receive them up to the end of this month, so email aaad.office@churchofengland.org but do it quickly!
Licensing
Despite the restrictions of the year so far, we had a new cohort of LLMs licensed in the cathedral in May. It was a licensing unlike all previous ones and each candidate’s 3 invited guests were distanced from each other.

Despite being stripped back to the bare essentials, it was a very moving service, and we were grateful to Jenny Ross and Jonathan Jennings for livestreaming the event for all those who couldn’t be there.

Our newly licensed LLMs licensed are Anna Couper (St Paul’s Beckenham), Ellen Couzens (Hoo St Werburgh), Pauline Foster and Stephanie Perfitt (Longfield), Rob Foxwell (Strood, St Nicholas w St Mary), Jess Heeb (Seal, St Peter & St Paul), George Johnson (Bexleyheath Christ Church), Peter Kettle (Meopham w Nurstead), Susan Leather (Westerham), Verity Mitchell (Bromley Common, St Augustine w St Luke) and Bobbie Simpson (Cray Valley).

Earlier this month 14 students who have completed the first year of the Bishops Certificate were selected for LLM training, and 14 students have met for the first time and will begin Bishops certificate training in September.

The selectors for LLM training are a mix of ordained and lay ministers, and some of the Lay Ministers involved have given their time to do this over several years. Each year though, there are new selectors, and this year Jessica Smith, curate at St Francis Strood was a first time selector. Afterwards she tweeted:

An absolute joy and privilege to be involved yesterday and today with selection for training for Licensed Lay Ministry in @SeeofRochester. Encountering these called, committed women and men from such a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and traditions....
.....hearing them speak with such passion and joy of their love for Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, their desire to serve, their commitment, for the long-haul to the vulnerable and marginalised in their diverse communities...
.....this gives me real hope for our communities and for the Church!
Comings and goings, and people news.
2021 has been a hard year for all of us, and there have been more deaths of Lay Ministers than in any previous years. Tricia circulated a message last month regarding the deaths of Les Jackson (LLM) Roy Maynard and Jill Marchant (both Readers). We subsequently heard that Sally Schepke (Pastoral Assistant from All Saints Foots Cray) died on Ascension Day following a stroke on Easter Monday.

We have also said Goodbye and Thank You to several Lay Ministers who have moved out of the diocese, and others who have felt the time has come to stand down and retire from authorised ministry.

In the context of all that – I am delighted to share some Lay Ministry good news with you!

Michael Richardson has been a Reader at Lamberhurst and Matfield parish since 1998, and in that time has ministered alongside several clergy. Mandy Carr, now Vicar of Weald, who knew Michael from her time as Vicar in Lamberhurst & Matfield, decided to take a new spin on “Called Together”, and introduced Michael to Julia Downing - the Director of Music in Weald. Julia’s father Peter Downing would have been known to some of you as he was a Reader in Weald, and later in Otford – Peter died on Boxing Day last year.

Michael and Julia were married at the end of June, when weddings were still subject to Covid restrictions, but the service was livestreamed and is now on YouTube – and was clearly an event of immense joy for the couple involved and all of their families and friends. Mandy Carr and Andrew Axon conducted the marriage together, and there were video contributions from friends from across the world.

Congratulations Michael & Julia!

Reminder – 2021 Annual Lay Ministry Conference.
The Rochester Archdeaconry celebration of Lay Ministry, which was originally booked for May this year, is now going ahead on 7th August, but the annual Lay Ministry Conference Day which last year had to be moved to Zoom, is not really very far off – tentatively planned for 2nd October at Christ Church Orpington! look out for more information in the coming weeks.
Anna Chaplaincy
One of the events in the Bishopscourt Marquee last month was commissioning Lead Anna Chaplains for each Archdeaconry, along with Jenny Hopkins who was commissioned as an Anna Chaplain for Hadlow Benefice.

There are 2 lead chaplains in each Archdeaconry, 1 ordained and 1 who is a Lay Minister.

In Rochester Margaret Hollands, Reader & PA from Hoo St Werburgh will be working with Elizabeth Robertson, Associate Priest in the Rural North West Kent Group of Churches, in Bromley and Bexley Diana Pattison, LLM from Bromley will be working with Sophie Sutherland, Anna Chaplain and Associate Priest at St Peter & St Paul Bromley, and in Tonbridge Jane Sankey Reader & PA from Platt will be working with Anne Bourne from the Sevenoaks Team ministry.

Anna Chaplaincy has been very challenging to maintain in lockdown, and you will be aware that not all Care Homes feel they have the capacity to open to visitors, so please pray for these Chaplains in their new roles as they encourage and support Anna Chaplaincy across the Diocese. Julia Burton Jones continues to lead this work across the diocese, but she also leads it in Canterbury Diocese, and works nationally for BRF, so is pleased to welcome these new colleagues.

Lay Funeral Ministry
This month Paul Wright licensed the first Lay Funeral Minister in Bromley and Bexley Archdeaconry – welcome to Andrew Hill from the Bexley Team. Andrew writes:
I had felt for a while that Funeral Ministry was an important ministry and could be the next step in my development in the church, in my role within the Bexley Team Ministry and more widely. I am Lay Chaplain to the local branch of The Royal British Legion. I had experience of preparing and leading memorial and remembrance services and had assisted at funerals (reading, leading intercessions).
In my paid job before I retired, I was a bereavement officer for a large financial organization. Sometimes I was one of the first people, a person spoke to after the death of a relative for advice and would often stay in contact with them right through the probate process.

After reflection and discussion with the Team Rector and Team Vicar, I believed this was the right way to enhance what I was doing and taking the Diocese's Funeral and Bereavement module confirmed this for me."

**National Strategy and General Synod**

If you are a reader of the Church Times or a Twitter user, you can’t have failed to notice the outrage from many clergy at the reports of the future of the CofE including ‘thousands of lay led congregations without the limiting factors of expensively trained clergy and buildings’.

It’s fair to say it was a badly reported leadup to the report being presented to General Synod about the future of the CofE. The actual presentation at Synod, by the Archbishop of York, was very supportive of the role of clergy, and of the parish system, as well as acknowledging the role of Lay leaders in the Church of the future.

Martin Sewell, Reader from Gravesend, sent me the link to watch it at https://youtu.be/RQ2sG1qooSM and I commend it to you. We showed it at our PCC meeting this month and people were encouraged and inspired. The Youtube video is very long – but Archbishop Stephen begins at approximately 1 hour 35, so do fast forward to that point.

July’s General Synod was the last one for the current representatives – and they had in fact done 6 years instead of the 5 they stood for because of Covid. Martin Sewell (Reader) and Angela Scott (LLM) have been among the Lay Reps for this Diocese, but Angela has been on Synod for 16 years in total and is not standing again.

There is a move to make the next synod more diverse and younger. Being a rep is not limited to Lay Ministers, so there might be someone in your parish who you’d might want to encourage. If you are on your Deanery Synod, you will have had an email about this (on 23rd July) but nominations are not limited to Deanery Synod reps.

There are a couple of short films on the Church of England Website – check it out – or contact Susanne Rogers at the Diocesan office who can tell you more.
How to get in touch
Diocesan Office staff have been asked to plan our return to the office, so for August I will be working some days in the office and some from home, and in September – all being well - back to 3 days pw in the office: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
Tricia’s working hours have changed, though her days remain the same, she will usually be in the office Tuesday and Thursday 1.30 pm – 3.30 pm Wednesday 9.00 am – 1.00 pm.

I forgot to take photographs, but earlier this month, 5 of the 6 Deputy Wardens and I met up in person for lunch. If you have found ministry in the past 18 months especially difficult and want to speak with someone who is a good listener – I commend these people to you. Like everyone else they have been Zooming and phoning but are now beginning to meet up with people in person.

In Bromley & Bexley Archdeaconry Miriam Giles, PA at St John’s Welling and Mark Newman, Reader and Evangelist at Biggin Hill
miriamgiles35@outlook.com
marknewman1955@gmail.com

In Rochester Archdeaconry Val Butler, Reader in South Gillingham Team and Vic Twine Reader at st Mary’s Gravesend
val.a.butler@googlemail.com
victortwine@blueyonder.co.uk

In Tonbridge Archdeaconry Hilary Sutton, Reader at Paddock Wood and Allan Jonnes, LLM at Bidborough & Southborough.
hilary.sutton1@btopenworld.com
allan.jonnes@btinternet.com

And finally – as I write this there are hopeful signs of infection numbers decreasing again, but the impact of removing restrictions has yet to be seen. Churches will all be taking different approaches to how they enjoy greater freedom whilst caring for the most vulnerable.

Some of you will be wondering what future your ministry will take. I have sent out Lay Ministry Development Review papers to some of you – thanks to those who have completed them. Some of you are unwell, others are bereaved, yet others will be busy and exhausted. The same will apply to the ordained and lay ministers you work with – look out for each other.

Thank you all for all you do across the Diocese. I hope you all manage to have some rest over the Summer, and are able to catch up with family and friends who you have missed.

With my prayers and best wishes for you all.