REFLECTIONS FROM BISHOP JAMES’ FAREWELL SERVICE
SATURDAY 3 JULY, 2021

Refection: Community Engagement/Chaplaincy
Reverend Ruth Bierbaum, Kent and Medway Partnership Trust
Chaplain (Mental Health)

My name is Ruth Bierbaum. As a priest, licensed as a chaplain in our local Mental
Health trust, I am a rare breed!

And there are other rare breeds such as prison chaplains and school chaplains,
and general hospital chaplains all working in different sectors, but as a part of
the Diocese.

Anomalies as we are, sitting outside of the Parish system, it is all too easy for
Bishops and therefore Dioceses to have a blind-spot for these vital ministries
which reach deep into our communities.

I am so pleased to say, that Bishop James has always had an eye on us! In a
good way!

He has always been very mindful of chaplaincy, making us feel valued and
supported; and working strategically to make sure we are included in
conversations going on at the heart of Diocese.

For instance, recently retired general hospital chaplain Canon Tim Mercer was
one of three sector chaplains included in Dean meetings.

And Bishop James invited me to sit on the Diocesan Safeguarding Executive
Committee.
He has over the years allowed us the comfort of meeting in the main lounge at Bishop’s Court and worshipping in the basement-Chapel there, all supported by his chaplain Lindsay – and often dropping in to find out how we are.

As Bishop to Prisons it has been clear to me that he has great insight into the complexities of supporting those with health and social issues, and of working in ever-changing secular institutions, and is keen to hear our observations and to share his own, from the Prison perspective.

If COVID hadn’t struck, I would have told you now about the amazing health and social care chaplaincy conference we had at Aylesford Priory in March 2020, encouraged and enabled very much by Bishop James - only of course it didn’t happen. Something for your successor to encourage us with perhaps?

But we healthcare chaplains have very much appreciated the support given by yourself and Bishop Simon by inviting us to regular zoom meetings especially during the bleakest days when the staff and patients were caught in the frenzy of pandemic.

So, I would like to say thank you Bishop James. Thank you for your gentle and approachable leadership and having a heart for chaplaincy.

We wish you and Bridget every blessing in Birmingham.

**Reflection: Lay Ministry**

**Alan Mitchell, Licensed Lay Minister at St Augustine with St Luke, Bromley Common**

It’s often said that our challenge as Christians is to discern where the Holy Spirit is at work, and then join in. I’d like to suggest that this is precisely what Bishop James has done in the area of lay ministry, the engagement of the whole people of God in God’s mission. And this may be a key part of the enduring legacy for which he will be remembered.
Let’s face it, Bishops come and go, but when we write the history of the Church in our generation, in particular post-COVID, a simpler, humbler, bolder Church, I suspect lay ministry may be one of the overarching, big-picture themes and James has played his part in supporting this. The affirmation of the vocation, discipleship and ministry of all God’s people.

Transforming Ministry, Monday to Saturday faith, missionary disciples, whatever language you choose. This is about more and more Christians responding to God’s call in their lives, discovering their vocations, sharing their God-given gifts. Ministry that is relational, collaborative, missional, glorious in its diversity. The Holy Spirit at work.

Some of you will already have seen the headline in this week’s Church Times. The debate at General Synod next weekend on Vision and Strategy. It is all over Twitter this morning, a target of ten thousand lay-led Christian communities in ten years’ time. We'll have to unpack what that actually means, but if the seeds being sown here come to fruition it could bring a fundamental change in the mission of the Church. Ordained and lay ministers working together.

And, would you believe it, Rochester diocese is ahead of the game in training a new generation of licensed lay ministers. Where Bishop James has led, other diocesan bishops are now following. Where Bishop James has led, Pope Francis follows. Just a couple of months ago, there was an announcement from the Roman Catholic church that they are setting up a new lay ministry of catechist.

Now bishops have power. Bishop James might shake his head, but they do. Not necessarily power to do everything they want. But power to stop things happening, to stifle new initiatives, to stop transformational change. Dare I say it, to get in the way of God’s plan. But that has never been James’ approach. He has enabled and affirmed and made possible the growth of lay ministry in our diocese.

Let me give you an example. One of the most important roles of a bishop is just to turn up.
And James turns up at lay ministry events. Just recently we had a service here in the cathedral to license this year’s group of new lay ministers and he stated very publicly that he saw it as an important event in the life of the diocese. Here in the cathedral. In some dioceses, ordination services happen in the cathedral and lay ministers are licensed locally. Not so in Rochester. We’re talking complementarity. It’s symbolic, but symbols speak loudly don’t they?

So, Bishop James, a very sincere thank you on behalf of all the lay ministers in the diocese, Readers, youth ministers, children’s and family ministers, Anna chaplains, hospital chaplains, and indeed from all the lay people of God in our churches. May God bless you in your ongoing ministry.

**Reflection: Vocations**

*Rev Belinda Beckhelling, Curate at Rochester Cathedral*

It is a rare thing to find someone who practises what they preach. Words are easily and lightly spoken but if a microscope were held up to us how many of our practical everyday lives would match up to the ideal we preach? Mahatma Gandhi said, ‘we but mirror the world.

All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change.’

Last year, twelve of us were ordained deacon at Rochester Cathedral. Looking around me, I was heartened to note, as a snapshot in time, a truly diverse group of ordinands in nearly every sense. Such a thing does not happen by accident. It is a reflection of the ideologies of Bishop James, our episcopal leader, mirrored in his work.
Thanks to his vision and leadership the church in this diocese is better equipped to attract and train lay and ordained ministers to meet the needs of its increasingly diverse community.

He has shown ‘clear commitment and action for equality of opportunity and anti-racist practice, which has been a source of strength and healing to many.’ Time and again, he shows that he does not seek to change the person but to challenge the system to welcome the person, asking questions like ‘what can we do to enable your ministry with regards to your disability?’.

In his relationships with the different churches ‘he has maintained a voice of care and understanding of all dimensions within the Church of England.’ Through perceptive questioning, careful listening and sensitivity to our specific situation and gifting he has worked with his team to identify productive pairings with parishes that honour our calling. As one curate explains, ‘he always gives the impression of knowing people individually’.

A truly pastoral Bishop in the biblical sense of the word, he has championed the cause of the outcasts of society - the homeless and the imprisoned, the orphans and the refugee. A deacon comments, ‘It was cool he was simultaneously our Bishop and Bishop for prisons.’

I have had the honour of deaconing for Bishop James on a number of occasions, the most complicated was the Easter Eucharist, Bishop and Deacon together, the ‘dream team’ as he calls us, for when I am stood at his right hand, all anxieties vanish and I am filled with a sense of calm that emanates from a man at peace with himself and his God. Bishop James, as fellow pilgrims, we thank you for the footsteps that invite, guide and point the way.
Reflection: Diversity

The Rev Canon Jeremy Blunden, Rector St George and St Barnabas Beckenham and Bishop’s Adviser on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic matters

Our calling to love God and love neighbour, speaking out against injustice, and speaking truth to power, is at the heart of the word of God, from the Hebrew Scriptures to the NT.

Yet speaking out is difficult.
Speaking out carries risk
And so often we hesitate or we keep silent.

In this community we call the Church in the Diocese of Rochester, we are blessed with people from all parts of our world. With many of us from the BAME community.

Bishop James, you did not hesitate to speak out against racial injustice, and have continued to work in supporting us throughout your time as Bishop of Rochester. But it is not just Rochester.

The Church has struggled for generations, to increase diversity and inclusivity at all levels, and whilst there is still a long road to travel, you have turned up the volume across the national Church and beyond. And you have sown the seed for others who will continue this work.

Much of your support is quiet, caring and unseen. At other times, things can get noisy.

And when the world screamed: Black Lives Matter, you stood alongside people of colour. You stood with us as an ally and helped us to bear the suffocating weight of racism.
You listened to our laments, our fears and our concerns. You gave us the space to breathe, in a world that frequently steals our breath. And you allowed us to hope, together, people who are Black, Brown and White, in the love of God in Jesus Christ.

We thank you for speaking out. For your leadership, your courage, your vision, and your love.

And we invite everyone who hears this, to follow your gracious example and stand with us, Walk with us. Learn with us. Kneel with us. Pray with us. Rise with us. Change the world with us. And in God’s name may it be so.

Thank you, Bishop James.

Reflection: Overseas Companion Links
- The Rt Rev Dr Farai Mutamiri, Bishop of Harare, Zimbabwe
- The Rt Rev Jacob Chimeleledya, Bishop of Mpwapwa, Tanzania
- The Rt Rev Dr Given Gaula, Bishop of Kondoa, Tanzania

The Rt Rev Dr Farai Mutamiri, Bishop of Harare, Zimbabwe
Farewells are never easy, and are often sad, but they can also be taken as a form of celebration of one’s wonderful life and work.

At the Diocese of Harare, we join with the Diocese of Rochester in bidding farewell to you Bishop James and Bridget, your wife. The Diocese of Harare has a long-standing special link with the Diocese of Rochester, through which we support and encourage each other in God’s mission.

I was honoured to attend your consecration as Bishop of Rochester in June 2010, and we have journeyed and known you and your wife since that time. In
the process, we have learnt countless things from you and your team. Amongst them is your spirituality and leadership style.

You also shared in our troubles. You took time out of your very busy schedule to visit us in 2011, and you witnessed how we were being persecuted and also saw our church properties being dispossessed. I remember the worship we held together in a tent and how you encouraged us to soldier on. The burden that was so heavy upon us became lighter.

Thank you for standing with us during our dark moments. Your legacy will remain in our hearts forever.

_The Rt Rev Jacob Chimeledya, Bishop of Mpwapwa, Tanzania_

Hello brothers and sisters at the Diocese of Rochester. Receive greetings from your brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Mpwapwa. I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to Bishop James. Bishop James was a man with a great heart and mission minded.

He was and remains, an encourager, a supporter of the mission of the Church. He was a friend to our partnership through team visits from both ends.

And so, we thank Bishop James and Bridget his wife. I still believe that the success of Bishop James was a result of support from his wife Bridget. So, Bridget, thank you very much for supporting our brother Bishop James Langstaff!

_The Rt Rev Dr Given Gaula, Bishop of Kondoa, Tanzania_

Dear friends in the Diocese of Rochester, on behalf of the people of the Diocese of Kondoa, myself and Lillian, I would like to take this opportunity to thank God for the ministry of Bishop James, which has touched so many people’s lives in this diocese.

Our relationship between the Diocese of Rochester and Kondoa, has grown-up from strength to strength because of Bishop James’ encouragement to all of us.
He has visited us many times and during his visiting, he has encouraged us so much, and his preaching of the Word, his gentle heart has been a really good model, to me personally as a bishop, but also the pastors of this diocese have learnt so much from him.

We encourage him to come and see us. Having retired is not the end of our friendship, but we believe that he will continue to be our friend. May God bless him, so much. Thank you.

**Tribute by Bishop Simon**

Bishop James was ordained deacon in 1981. The year of Charles and Diana, the Brixton riots and Botham’s Ashes, for those who remember.

A few days ago he passed forty years in ordained ministry. As we’ve experienced just over ten of them in Rochester, this means for every minute of ministry Bishop James has given us, he has given three more elsewhere. So as we say goodbye and give thanks today, we are doing so on behalf of a much larger group of people whose lives continue to be shaped by who Bishop James is and what he did for them.

Those who have been in ordained ministry for any length of time will know how energy sapping those forty years must have been. And those who work around him will know how hard and often lonely the role of Diocesan Bishop must be. Yet throughout it all, he has shown great character. Lots of kindness and gentleness, heroic self-control, and a good sense of humour that ensured people stayed grounded.

And a great mind that knows how to do strategy while also having forensic attention to procedure and detail that enabled the bigger things to get done, both here in the diocese and in the national Church.
A lot of people are grateful for his instinct for permission giving, which allowed the Holy Spirit to do the work of God. Time and again, people who work in areas like chaplaincy, lay ministry and community engagement say how confident and valued they feel as a result of his commitments.

The pandemic has made this the strangest of ends and not allowed us to do the things both Bishop James and Bridget deserved, especially given the levels of hospitality they have offered us over the years, but God knows, and we hope they both sense the love felt across the diocese for them right now.

Bishop Simon