

5 January 2021

*From Bishop Christine - the new Covid restrictions*

*This mailing is being sent to all Clergy (including PTO), Honorary Assistant Bishops, Former PTO, Licensed Lay Ministers, Churchwardens, Readers (including PTO), Deanery Lay Chairs, Deanery Synod Secretaries, Deanery Finance Officers, PCC Secretaries, PCC Treasurers, Lay Canon, Family and Community Missioners, Parish Safeguarding Advisers, Diocesan Director of Education, Assistant Director of Education, Diocesan Secretary, Diocesan Registrar and Deputy, Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, Bishop's Council, Church House staff.*

Dear sisters and brothers,

We're once again entering a very challenging phase of our journey through this pandemic, and the challenges are not felt equally. Those who are vulnerable through frailty, serious health conditions, poverty, bereavement and other life circumstances will be facing yet again the hardest challenges of all. I am also mindful of, and holding in prayer, our children and young people, their parents, teachers and all support staff in our schools, as we return to home schooling until the February half term.

As people of faith, serving our communities, our task will continue to be people of prayer seeking, with God's grace, to show God's love and the reality of God's hope. How we do that in practical terms will be determined by local circumstances and realities. In this lockdown, unlike the first one, public worship is permitted. I know that some of you will be anxious about this, and some will be pleased. For my part, as your Bishop, I want you to know that you will have my wholehearted support for whatever decisions you make. I am entirely convinced that the best decisions are made with local knowledge, at the local level. I will respond positively and quickly to any PCC request to cease holding public worship for a period, and I will also support any PCC which decides that it would be right to continue to offer public worship in their context. I am immensely proud of the way our churches have worked so hard to be Covid safe, and it is because of this that the Government has allowed public worship to continue. I would urge though that where we continue to hold services we pay as much attention to what happens at the end of worship as during worship itself. It is so understandable and natural that we should wish to enjoy greeting friends and neighbours at the end of the service, but this sadly undermines all our efforts to be safe, and for this period must not happen.

You are all being held deeply in my prayers. I am also holding in prayer Mark Wroe, who today was ordained as a bishop in the Church of God. Please continue to pray for him as he prepares to take up the duties of Bishop of Berwick from the 17th January.

Tomorrow we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. Please hold our orthodox brothers and sisters in your prayers, and most especially let's pray that we offer a glimpse of the brilliant light of Christ in our lives - a light that is the hope of the world.

God bless you,

+ Christine