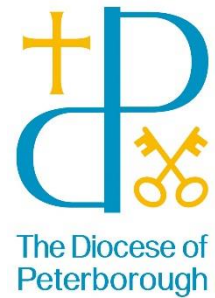


18 April 2021



Dear friends

What a fortnight since I last wrote! The death, mourning and funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh have touched us all. The Queen and her family are in our prayers, with joy at her clear Christian faith.

Emerging from lockdown

Terror, fear, caution, tentative emergence, rational relief, excitement, irrational relief, throwing caution to the winds, mad abandon There is a wide spectrum of feelings and behaviours about how we move on in our personal or communal or church lives.

I want to suggest that we should be very glad at the reduction in the number of cases, happy to see some freedoms returned, but still very aware of the probable third wave. We should not put (even subtle) pressure on people to rush back to “normal”, at least until everyone had been offered two vaccinations, probably in the autumn, and even then be alert for signs of vaccine-resistant variants. We should rejoice in what we can do together, but not do anything to endanger others: that, I think, is basic Christianity.

Over the last year we have held monthly zoom meetings of our rural deans, looking at the situation and seeking to support clergy and parishes as far as we can. One hugely important question is now arising, as reflected by one of our number:

Colleagues are sensing an expectation/pressure that we will be quick off the blocks when the lockdown lifts with new and blended ways of being church. But we are fatigued/ tired/ jaded - even after our Easter break - we are struggling with our mental health, desperate to see our families and ready for a holiday away from the vicarage/rectory. And many of our congregations just want things to go back to the way they were. Any advice as to how we might reconcile these different 'demands' will be gratefully received.

I don't claim to have all the answers! I look forward to hearing and sharing wisdom on this. I do think that we (incumbents as much as bishops) have to be leaders, not just followers. That is our calling, though it adds to the pressure and the tiredness. One idea which I am hearing from various places is that zoom-type gatherings (needing minimal technical resources) could be a good option for midweek and evening gatherings, for study and discussion groups, for some councils and committees. Sunday morning church, gathering together and sharing word, sacrament, and fellowship, is really important – though we might have ideas about incorporating some technology, at least recording a hymn, a reading, and the sermon for sending to those who can't be there.

Talk about this with colleagues. Think about sharing resources. Don't rush back to "normal." I think we need to be tentative for most of this year, taking time to think things through and try things out. But do this gently, and don't jump back in at top speed.

Your thoughts are welcome: chapter meetings might be a good place to discuss, and I'll be keen to hear thoughts and ideas [by email](#).

Bible Study on Galatians

Since my series of studies on Hebrews, I have been asked for more such material. I have grown to enjoy online teaching of this sort, so I've done another series, this time on Galatians. It is freely available to watch, or to use in groups, as you wish.

There is a short introduction, then four half-hour talks, each accompanied by a reading of the passage; you can [download the entire series](#), watch it on my [YouTube Channel](#) or download session by session below:

| | |
|---|--|
| 0. Introduction | Download video file |
| | Download audio file |
| | |
| 1. The Gospel of Christ (ch 1.1-2.10) | Download session 1 video files |
| | Download session 1 audio files |
| | |
| 2. Justified by faith (ch 2.11-3.29) | Download session 2 video files |
| | Download session 2 audio files |
| | |
| 3. Children of the promise (ch 4.1-5.6) | Download session 3 video files |
| | Download session 3 audio files |
| | |
| 4. Live by the Spirit (ch 5.7-6.18) | Download session 4 video files |
| | Download session 4 audio files |

I am open to suggestions as to what might be next. Perhaps something from the Old Testament? If there is a Bible book or theme for which you would like this sort of study material, please let [Joanne Gibson](#) know.

In Paradise

I am sorry to report the deaths of two of our retired clergy: Jan Collins and Paul Rose. Both were long-standing faithful servants. We thank God for them, and extend sympathy to their families and friends. And we rejoice in our Easter hope.

With love in Christ

+ Donald