

To licensed clergy and licensed LLMs

1 May 2020

St Philip and St James

Dear Sisters and Brothers

Our cathedral's 800th anniversary

This week is the 800th anniversary of the founding of the new cathedral here in Salisbury. A creative programme of events was planned, some in partnership with others in the city, counties and region. Everything would have been good in itself but, because the cathedral is at the heart of the city, the events were intended to be part of the relaunching of Salisbury post-Novichok. Inevitably either they are being done differently, or they have been postponed or they have been cancelled. Lots is nevertheless available online and can be accessed via [the cathedral's website](#), including [the YouTube Service of Thanksgiving](#) last Tuesday the 28 April.

This Sunday's *Sunday Worship* on BBC Radio 4 at 8.10am will mark the 800th anniversary. It has been beautifully prepared by our colleagues at the cathedral, so do listen either live or when you can.

Our church buildings

In this period of exile from our church buildings it has made me think about what we are missing from them, about what they are and do for us. Not having access is a real deprivation for us and our communities. Being unable to allow the bells to be rung to show our community's support for key workers on Thursday evenings or to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day affects those beyond our worshipping communities. It is uncomfortable but it is in line with the national Church's guidance.

Simon Jenkins observed that our churches are "the museums of England". In some ways they are. Part of the genius of Christianity as a missionary religion is the way it takes shape and form in different cultures in every time and place. Our church buildings have witnessed the sweep of English history. The stones and contents cry out with the history and people of

our communities. They do this from our present perspective. They are also places where people from earlier times have prayed and done their deep living with one another under God. As Philip Larkin wrote in *Church Going*, "A serious house on serious earth it is." They are 'thin' places, where, in T S Eliot's phrase, "prayer has been valid."

In exile we miss what was familiar but we are learning to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Eliot again, but we need to take care, not to have 'had the experience but missed the meaning'. At the last Diocesan Synod, I quoted a former President of the Methodist Conference who wrote in an ordination Bible:

Study this world.

Sense its needs.

Speak to its condition.

This is natural territory for the Church where we teach what it is to be reflective practitioners, conscious of our being in the presence of God and of our acting in God's world. Online worship has been a revelation: in our homes, connecting better and sometimes awkwardly with our everyday faith, with people looking at each other, mostly being still, sometimes evidently distracted! Often there are other people looking in and wondering about Christianity. Like the novelist Julian Barnes, there are many in our society who say they don't believe in God but they miss Him.

Post Covid-19

People keep saying that, when we go back, we will not be the same but it is not yet obvious how we will be. Our questions are beginning to form and we need to be working with them. At recent meetings online of Rural Deans and Lay Chairs and at last night's Bishop's Council a few people were asked to address these:

- What aspects of our Churches' future have been brought into the present by the current crisis?
- Will 'normal' have changed? What might remain and what might default back afterwards?
- While normal service is suspended and we are viewing things differently, what do you foresee for the Church of 2030?
- Should we 'seize the day' and make any changes now to prepare ourselves for this?

If those questions help you, please use them in your own context and see what we are learning in this strange time in which we need to go deeper and to be curious with one another in the presence of God.

We are coming towards the end of this period of lockdown. There will be a phased reopening of our society, including our churches. To start with, that is likely to continue to be very limited. Those of us who are older or who for health reasons are more vulnerable are likely to be at home longer.

I have been very grateful for the ways in which you have responded locally. Aspects of the guidance from the Archbishops are debatable but we needed, and they provided, clear national guidance consonant with the main advice from Government to stay home. As a diocese, we will continue to use their guidance in the next phase of recovery. When there are changes, they will be on the diocese's website. As I write, the National Church has not yet posted [further government advice on the testing of essential workers](#) but it seems that we, as 'religious workers', are included within the definition of 'essential workers' and so may now be able to get tested if we, or members of our households, are showing symptoms of coronavirus. Please refer to the guidance for further information.

Funeral fees

While we are in lockdown, we have not been able to offer to the bereaved the sort of funeral and care that we would normally wish to provide. We have had to commend the departed at the graveside, at the church gate or at the crematorium in abbreviated ceremonies with a very limited number of mourners. Many will wish to hold a memorial service once that is possible. The Bishop's Guidelines on fees suggests that fees should be charged for a memorial service as if it were a funeral in church ie £199 split between the DBF and the PCC. If fees have already been levied for the simple service possible during lockdown, to charge again for a memorial service might seem lacking in pastoral sensitivity. The basic principle behind the fees specified by General Synod is that a funeral should cost £199 with an additional fee to the PCC in the case of a burial to help towards the PCC's upkeep of the churchyard. I suggest that we should try to achieve that end if possible so that, where fees have already been levied for the funeral, any further fee for a memorial service may be waived. Where no fees have been charged for the funeral that has already taken place, it might be appropriate to charge for a memorial service.

Dates

You will have been copied in to my letter to churchwardens advising them that the Visitation due to have been held at the cathedral in June has been postponed. Once APCMs have been held - and the deadline by which they must take place has been extended to the 31 October – we will review whether a Visitation in the cathedral is possible or whether we must revert to local visitations in archdeaconries as usual.

The Clergy Day due to have taken place on the 8 July has been cancelled as have all the Archdeaconry days.

The Ordinations of Priests and Deacons have also been postponed from Petertide to Michaelmas. Assuming the cathedral is open again by then, they will take place on Saturday the 26 September – priests at 11.00am and deacons at 5.00pm - and the Licensing of LLMs due to have taken place on the 26 September has been moved to form part of the cathedral's Evensong at 4.30pm on Sunday the 27 September.

The Children's Society hope to hold another Christingle Service in the cathedral on the 9 December at 2.30pm for Year 5/6 children as they did so successfully in 2018.

CMD

I am conscious that we are in a transitional year for our CMD provision. The creation of a new Mission, Ministry and Communication Department, together with the current restrictions, has meant we are unable to offer the usual programme of training events to support your ministry. In acknowledgement of this – and as a small investment in your ongoing formation - we will be sending to licenced clergy and licensed LLMs a £30 book grant, to be used for your own enrichment and study. Plans are afoot for a refreshed CMD programme, about which you will hear in the coming months.

And finally

This feels like it's going to be a long haul, so please be careful with yourself and with others. Try to make a routine about prayer, work and recreation as well as keeping contact with others. Please ensure that you take time off. That has always been difficult but is even more important now.

In the resurgence of prayers being circulated, I like this from St Teresa of Avila:

*Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing frighten you,
all things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things,
whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.*

God bless,

+ Nicholas Seven