

From the Diocesan Secretary

Unplanned conversations

David Pain writes:

As we move through Lent and approach the anniversary of the ‘first Covid lockdown’ I have been noticing how the pattern of conversation has changed over the year. For me in my role the loss of the opportunity to travel around the Diocese and to chat with people has been a significant change. Ideas, impressions, experiences are often shared through those informal meetings and discussions. I am looking forward to the days when these conversations are more possible again. Opening an unplanned conversation can lead to new understanding.

During this year some of the ‘organised’ and planned conversations have changed too – meeting people by Zoom, with ‘chat’ and breakout rooms has worked for some people in creative ways. The voices of those who would normally be sat quietly on ‘the back row’ are heard more fully. Where we continue to hold these meetings online ‘post lockdown’ my hope is that we become more creative in their format and not imagine that the best online meeting is essentially an old style meeting in person taking place digitally. Effective participation in the governance of our diocesan structures will be a key issue later this year as we elect representatives to the Diocesan and General Synods, and in turn their committees and councils.

The Bishop’s Council has agreed the scope of a discussion about our future needs for Diocesan offices. Thinking carefully about the physical meeting spaces we need and want is going to be an important choice for the future. Last month at Church House we started a new staff drop-in conversation every Tuesday morning – no agenda, no formal business, just a chance to meet in the ‘virtual kitchen’ and chat with people there over a ‘virtual cuppa’. Many churches do this with online coffee mornings and drop ins. The great thing about these unplanned conversations is the *risk* that we might hear something new! Something that changes our perceptions and helps us to move on in our understanding and indeed in our faith. With or without offices, in physical meetings and online this year has led me to rethink what it means to meet and to talk together.

David Pain

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