

To all licensed clergy, those with PtO and LLMs

The Feast of St Britwold, Bishop of Ramsbury (1005-1045), 2021

Dear all,

In the coming week we can reasonably expect that the 100,000th death in the UK from Covid-19 will be reported. We are not yet at the peak of the present wave and, despite the very good news of the vaccine, the end is still not in sight. I think you are doing brilliantly but it is hard work and, at the moment, it feels a bit relentless without the usual recreations and distractions of being able to get out and socialise. The stress of uncertainty, unpredictability and uncontrollability is very wearing so have a care for yourself and one another.

Online Sermons

I hope that churches online will be helped by [the sermons being posted by the bishops](#) each week from now until Easter. They should be available from Thursday for the following Sunday. Sorry there was a glitch yesterday with the first of them from me. We are doing these in response to several requests and hope they will give you the opportunity of not having to prepare a sermon every Sunday. Use them as and when they are useful.

Trustworthy Leaders

In our present circumstances, when trust is in short supply in our world, I have found it helpful to go back to the work done with some of us by Prof Veronica Hope Hailey in 2018 and 2019 on Trustworthy Leadership. I apologise for failing to publish [the summary](#) of what she gave me at the time, as I should have done, but I hope it is still useful now. The full report has been redacted to exclude information about data collection and the actual surveys which some of you had undertaken and given to Veronica because they were supplied on a confidential basis.

We discussed this report at the time as a Bishop's Staff prior to Covid-19 and had begun to address some of the issues it raised. Communication has increased significantly, especially since the start of the pandemic, and the latest clergy wellbeing survey suggests there was an improvement in morale as a result. The reorganisation at Church House is intended both to save costs and provide better service but that's difficult with staff working from home and we know the changes are going to take time to 'bed-in'. As with clergy, parishes and schools, our colleagues at Church House are working a small miracle, mostly from home.

Veronica teaches that trustworthy leaders are vulnerable, competent, benevolent and reliable and that their actions are predictable. In present circumstances these are quite difficult qualities for clergy, or anyone, to demonstrate. We are all feeling vulnerable in the face of the virus and of the economic, social, environmental and climate crises. It is clear that this is a big moment in the world's history. The humility of people who are not the centre of their own story but who love God and their neighbour and care for the precious creation in which we live is a gift to mobilise if we are really to build back better.

Veronica suggested those who are interested might also look at [her latest report](#)

showing how senior leadership in other organisations has tried to maintain trust through the early stages of Covid-19.

Lent, Holy Week and Easter

[Guidance was posted by the C of E this week](#) which will be helpful in your planning for Lent, Holy Week and Easter. I am not saying nothing will change between now and then but it is helpful to see how services might work online and in person.

You might like to know that I will be presiding and preaching in the cathedral on Ash Wednesday (the 17 February) at 5.30pm and the service will be streamed live and remain online for a limited period afterwards. Again, if it is helpful, you might want to direct people to this service, not just to save additional local provision but as a way for the diocese to gather together at the start of Lent.

The Blessing of Oils and the Renewal of Ordination Vows on Maundy Thursday in the cathedral at 11.00am is a highlight in the diocesan year. It, too, will have to be live streamed but I hope you will make it a priority to be there online. It is wonderful preparation for the keeping of the Great Three Days throughout the diocese. There is an upside to our enforced circumstances in that no one will have to travel and this year the clergy from the Channel Islands will join us for the first time. The service will remain available for a limited period for those who want to watch it later.

APCMs

[The Instrument](#) providing for APCMs taking place remotely online remains in place, so please make use of this.

Last year the deadline for APCMs was extended to the 31 October. It would be helpful this year if you are able to keep to the usual timetable and hold these meetings before the end of May. We need to retain accountability for finance and good order; perhaps that's particularly important during a period of stress when things can easily go wrong. Church officers also deserve the opportunity to reconsider their positions.

It was encouraging to see the number and quality of clergy standing for the casual vacancy on General Synod this month. In the summer there will be new elections for General Synod. The electorate of lay members is the lay members of Deanery Synod so please use your APCMs to encourage people to stand for Deanery Synod to elect their General Synod representatives.

Epiphany 3

The Gospel on Sunday is John 2.1-11, the wedding at Cana in Galilee and the miracle of the water being turned into wine - the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary. It is a resurrection story: "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana of Galilee...". In this time of pandemic we pray for those who have died and for those who grieve them, for those who are sick and for all who care for them, and for all of us feeling isolated that we may know our human solidarity and God's presence with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

+Nicholas Sarum