

Our Ref: +RT-ADs/ajh

5th January 2021

To: All Licensed Clergy, All Chaplains, Churchwardens and Chapelwardens, Parish Officers, All Readers, PTO, Honorary Assistant Bishops, Area Deans, Assistant Area Deans, Lay Deans, Deputy Lay Deans, Diocesan Staff, Diocesan Registrar

Dear friends

Well, here we are again. Another national lockdown has been announced. This time, however, we know more of what to expect in the next few weeks – there are less ‘unknown unknowns’ than before. The need to be kind to one another will be really important to get through the next weeks and months. Remember to pace yourselves and take the time needed for self-care too. We hope that you were able to have some rest over Christmas and renew your own energy reserves, to enable you to face this fresh lockdown with hope and fortitude.

This new year will be full of challenge as we continue to fight the virus. Vaccines are being delivered but we have more hills yet to climb. As we begin a new year, we would like to send our love and gratitude to you for all you have given over this past year, in serving your community, and in faithfully living out the story of God’s love. We look with hope and expectancy for God’s presence to be evident amongst us for 2021 and we trust Him to provide all we need for what is to come.

Personal plans over Christmas celebrations and worship had to be changed at the last minute and we are now having to take decisions about future worship. We want to assure you of our support to do whatever is best in your context. Worship is not being banned, private prayer, funerals and, in exceptional cases, weddings can continue in accordance with government restrictions. However please be wise in making the most sensible choice for both you and your communities.

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We would like to commend that you take worship online where possible. The Government recommends us to work from home if able to do so, and only essential travel is allowable. For the immediate future all licensing services will now be by Zoom. It is safer and responsible therefore to remain at home if we can, not only for our own safety but also in order that the disease does not continue to transmit at the rate it currently is. This does not mean you are unable to enter your churches or livestream if that is your desire but please think carefully about both yourself and the message you are sharing with others.

A Bishops' dispensation, permitting worship to be suspended in your church buildings, is available to all on request and will cover you for closure (when required) until September. If you choose to only make a short-term decision for a couple of weeks then that is a matter for the PCC and requires you only to let the Bishop's office know of your intention. Whatever the local view, we want you to know our support and care. Please be in touch with your Archdeacon or the Bishops' office for any help necessary.

There's a long road ahead and therefore our diocesan week of committing to everyday prayer through our 'Archdeaconry days' is more important than ever. We have over 500 people committed to joining us from this Sunday. If you have not already signed up then please consider it. Sign up at bathandwells.org.uk/archdeaconry-days-2021/. This coming Sunday there is a diocesan service of worship which will mark the beginning of the week together which you can join in with or use Bishop Ruth's reflection or parts of the service in your own digital worship. You will be able to find the service at bathandwells.org.uk/2021/01/week-of-prayer/ on Sunday.

We are all very happy to be invited to preach live or recorded at online services with you. This month, three of our retired bishops are producing recorded reflections for incorporation in online services, which I hope you may find helpful. They will be available from next week on the diocesan website.

Finally, Bishop Peter continues to remain in touch and sends the following message to us all...

'As 2021 gets underway I send my warmest greetings and best wishes to everyone. May the Lord walk with you and watch over you'. Bishop Peter is recovering from his stem cell transplant in isolation. Please continue to pray for him and Jane as they keep distanced from all possible infection.

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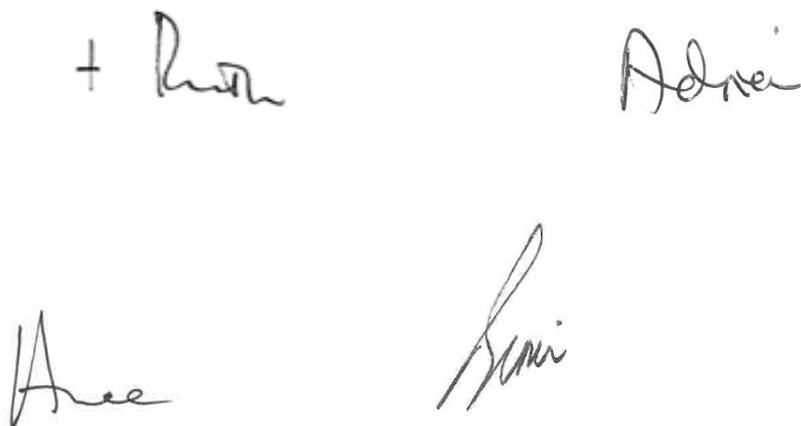
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As a diocese we are using Colossians 3:12-17 to accompany us through all the sorrows and joys of the year ahead. Those words speak to us and are a prayer for us now as much, as ever:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

With all good wishes...



The image contains four handwritten signatures in cursive script, arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top-left signature begins with a cross symbol followed by the name 'Ruth'. The top-right signature is 'Adri'. The bottom-left signature is 'Aree'. The bottom-right signature is 'Sami'.

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