

Holy Cross Day

Pastoral Letter to the Monmouth Diocesan Clergy: September 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St Paul reminds the fledgling Church that 'God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong'. Paul was, of course, referring back to the cross; the ultimate symbol of weakness and shame. But he was also wanting to encourage those who had chosen to follow Jesus and had become his disciples. These new Christians in Corinth were being marginalized and persecuted not just because of their faith in Jesus but because they were patterning their lives on his and following all that he taught: supporting the weak, welcoming the stranger, loving one another through all the trials and tribulations they were facing and finding the courage to stand firm in their faith even in the face of death. They knew, and St Paul was reminding them, that the cross was not the end but the gateway to new life.

We continue to live with COVID-19 in our midst with all the uncertainty, fear and limitations on our freedoms that it brings to our lives. This inevitably and not surprisingly takes its toll on us all, as does the unpredictability of an ever-changing picture. We may well find ourselves feeling weary with it all, helpless, fragile and vulnerable; and understandably so. It is precisely into this kind of context that the cross speaks. For it assures us that in all our pain and suffering, helplessness and vulnerability, Christ is with us, suffering alongside us as we seek to be faithful to his call to follow him. There is no magic wand to take it away but there is the assurance that we are not alone. Moreover, it is not the end. For Christ crucified is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. And through that power and wisdom he will, in his own good time and way, bring light out of our darkness, hope out of despair, strength in our weakness and new life through the dying both within and around us that we experience day by day.

Be assured of my prayers for you and for the parishes you serve, as well as for your family.

Continuing Ministerial Development

Hopefully, you will be aware by now of a series of webinars being offered to help further our thinking on what it means to be ministers of the gospel in the light of the impact that COVID-19 continues to have on our life and witness. I strongly encourage you to sign up to these sessions which promise to enrich and support both our personal discipleship and corporate life as the Body of Christ. By sharing our experience and reflecting with others on how we might best respond to where we find ourselves from a range of very different perspectives, we will better discern where God may be leading us and explore together how we might best shape our prayer and worship, ministry and service for today's needs. The sessions look at

- Ministers in a virtual world
- Lockdown Prayer & Spirituality
- Social & Political Activism
- Virtual worship and online presidency

More information about the sessions and how to sign up to them is on the diocesan website.

Supporting our own well-being

I have been very impressed with the support offered by The Society of Martha and Mary through their online hub. The Sheldon Hub is 'a safe space for people in ministry to meet, share and support each

other' offering various forums for conversation, resources for doing healthy ministry together and a prayer room. It is free, it is confidential and you can remain anonymous, if you wish.

<https://www.sheldonhub.org/>

A list of various trusts and grant-making bodies are now available for you to look at on the diocesan website at <https://monmouth.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/resources> Do use them to support your own development, spiritual nourishment and wellbeing.

For those wanting to look specifically at the ways in which the pandemic may have impacted on our psychological and emotional well-being, a useful tool can be found at <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-covid-19> This three hour long course is free and can be completed in your own time. It can help us understand our own response to the stresses of the pandemic, lockdown and uncertainty but also equip us to understand the impact on others and how best to support them.

For your prayers

RIP

We give thanks to God for the life and faithful ministry of two priests who have died recently: Desmond Pearce and Peter Crocker. Desmond Pearce served 2000 – 2003 in New Tredegar and lived for many years in Blackwood. He died on 5th August, two days short of his 90th birthday. Peter Crocker died on 5th September having served in Bassaleg (2002-2006) and then in Bedwas with Machen with Michaelston – y – Fedw with Rudry until 2019. His funeral is on September 18th in Hereford. Please pray for their families and loved ones.

Retiring

Our prayers and good wishes go with Harald Thomas, as he retires from his role as Assistant Priest in the Rectorial Benefice of Cwmbran at the end of this month after 23 years of faithful ordained ministry. Harald was made Canon of Newport Cathedral in 2010, the first NSM in this diocese to be honoured in this way. His wife, Dorothy, was also ordained and retired earlier this year.

Those who are sick

We continue to pray for the Revd Brenda Jones and the Revd Nick Adams, both in Upper Islwyn MA, who are ill and would value your prayers. Also, for the Revd David Kellen at St Mellons in the Wentloog MA. Others who are unwell or in need would prefer that their names are not given out in this mailing, though some of them will undoubtedly be known to some of you.

And a final request for your prayers for those being ordained and licensed next month and the parishes that they will serve. The Ember list was in last week's Friday mailing.

As we reflect on the cross of Christ, may we each be given the grace to follow the example of his patience and humility that we may also be made partakers of his resurrection.

With my prayers, as always

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Cherry', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.