



To all clergy and lay ministers in the Teulu Asaph

My dear friends, brothers and sisters working for the Kingdom,

At difficult times especially, the psalms come into their own, and I find myself meditating today on Psalm 130.

I wait for the LORD; my soul does wait, and in His word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning—
more than watchmen wait for the morning. (*verses 5 and 6*)

It is, I believe, a powerful image. Anyone who has waited up through the night time, for good news or for bad, will know the feeling. The darkness is intense and wraps around; we sit patiently, and at long last there comes the first glimmer of the dawn, then a steady and growing lightening, which becomes an unstoppable glow that bursts eventually into sunlight. Everyone who has participated in a true Easter vigil (early on Easter morning) will know as well how powerfully it aids our celebration of the Resurrection.

God, it seems, has blessed us with some beautiful sunshine to accompany our coronavirus crisis, which comes as a welcome relief after all the gloom of clouds, rain and flooding which opened the year. However, there is a real sense of a shadow falling over us as we learn to cope with a new mode of living, maybe in isolation, and with the danger that people whom we know and love may be touched with illness and the threat of severe illness or death.

In such circumstances, we can hope for God's help – not for escape – but the quiet internal witness of the Spirit, which gives cause for hope, for resilience and for strength. Whatever lies ahead also includes his grace and blessing and the gifts of the spirit to enable us to conquer.

This will be my prayer for all of us: that God's grace will bless us as the sunrise. A priest friend of mine (aka St Nicholas, for those who have met him) shared the following aspirations:

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people, God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs,
for as long as it takes
wherever you call us.

Thank you

The Bench will be meeting virtually tomorrow through the joys of Skype, and there may well be further guidance to offer even before then in the light of the governments' announcements

last night, but in the meantime, thank you first of all for rising to the challenge of ministry so brilliantly in this last couple of weeks. Streamed services of worship, plans for caring for the most vulnerable in our congregations and communities, clever ideas and messages of hope – all these reveal a Church at work in the way that I hoped for when I wrote last. Such streamed services can continue. Please keep sending any good news stories in. We'd like to publicise these, for the encouragement of all.

What shall we do?

The Welsh and UK governments issued new and stricter guidance last night concerning quarantine regulations. All gathering other than essential one to one meetings are not to take place, and our Churches are to be closed (except for solitary prayer, the official guidance from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government says). Further details on how these and other regulations are to be applied will be forthcoming as soon as the bishops have consulted on them. For the present, clergy are asked to familiarise themselves with the guidance already issued, and to act accordingly.

In my last letter, I urged you to care for yourselves, and it is good to hear of those who have taken good note of advice, and self-isolated where appropriate. Notifications are coming through to the archdeacons, and being fed through to me, and I hold you in my prayers. If you are ill, nurse yourselves, and do not be shy to ask for help. Please let the archdeacon know if you are self-isolating, and notify him in the normal way if you are taken ill.

Self-isolation or not, if you are able, ministry does not end of course. I believe that we should all be measuring our time, and re-calibrating our ministry at this time. It seems to me that there are four blocks of time in the average day, and we need to give ourselves to these in equal proportion. The first is time given to God – waiting patiently for the Lord to speak to us in and through prayer, through our reading of the Scriptures, and in quietness and meditation in his presence. The second is in pastoral care: the telephone and email must replace conventional pastoral care, but I hope that all the members of our congregations can know the ministry of contact from our clergy. When nothing else demands our attention, we could perhaps simply go through the address lists and phone everyone. We will be trying to do just that as a team from Esgobty over coming weeks.

The third is running our Churches – preparing those streamed liturgies or other prayers in electronic or printed form, for distribution, so that the call to prayer, intercession and worship does not cease, and that people are aided in their spiritual journeys. This also includes communicating with your colleagues. We love to hear your news here in Esgobty. The fourth is caring for ourselves, and those nearest and dearest to us. Love heals, mends and strengthens in a profound way.

Days filled in this way are unlikely to be leisurely, but will demand energy and application. As someone once said to me in another context: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That toughness in you is something for which to give thanks at this time – in isolation or not.

How shall we pray?

All streamed and recorded services that we know of are placed on the diocesan website on the coronavirus resources page (dioceseofstasaph.org.uk/coronavirus). Some brilliant ideas are coming through and you're doing a great deal. I interpret the rules to say that they will necessitate the involvement of no more than two people (a worship leader and a producer) in any one location from now on, however.

I personally aim to get up more recordings of services "from Esgobty", although the recorded clips are likely to be from people in their own spaces from now on. There should be short services for prayer for each Sunday, for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, as well as a generic Eucharist in the near future. I hope that you will all take this opportunity to deepen your own prayer life, as you seek to sustain others. I would like to thank Michael Balkwill and Karen Maurice for helping to get the show on the road.

NSMs, LLMs and commissioned ministries, as well as active retireds.

I am conscious that none of you are full time, and are volunteers for the sake of the Kingdom. I want to say to you that I appreciate all that you give to the Church in the name of the Lord, and I know that you will be giving more than you should in all likelihood. I am grateful for what you give, but hope that you too will care for yourselves, and measure what you do by the working agreements you have.

Pastoral Care Tree

In endeavouring to care for each other, I suggest that we each take responsibility for a corner of God's vineyard. The archdeacons and I will be paying special attention to our communication with the Mission Area Leaders, and with the clergy. I should be grateful if Mission Area Leaders could take especial care for all the members of their Shared Ministry Teams in authorised ministries. I should also be grateful if all ministers, ordained, lay licensed and commissioned, could work out how they will maintain contact with parishioners.

A reminder

that all updates, information, resources and news in connection with our current circumstances is available at www.dioceseofstasaph.org.uk/coronavirus I also attach a pastoral letter for the people of God in St Asaph diocese, which I should be grateful if you would circulate to all members of your congregation.

All we have been baptised into one body and made to drink of the one Spirit. In the one body therefore let us pursue the things that make for peace.

Pax et bonum,
+Gregory