



## The Diocese of Southwark

Ascension Day 2020

## The Bishop of Southwark

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### To the Clergy of the Diocese of Southwark

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to you on Ascension Day!

I am writing to express my personal appreciation for the resourceful ways you have been extending ministry and care to your communities. I very much hope that you are taking good care of yourselves and that this will include a commitment to taking days off and a good balanced approach to each day. I sense our daily patterns have become less distinct during these weeks. There is a story of the mother who on asking Mahatma Gandhi to remonstrate with her child for eating too many sweets was told to come back two weeks later. This she duly did and the advice was solemnly given as requested. When she asked why there had been this delay, Gandhi said that two weeks earlier he was eating too many sweets himself. In the same way I realise that in encouraging you to take your days off I need to start by holding the mirror up to myself and act accordingly!

Since the lockdown restrictions began halfway through Lent we have journeyed together through Holy Week and Eastertide sharing familiar liturgies and lections in unfamiliar settings. It has been a difficult time, but I hope that many of you, like me, have been able to draw more deeply on the Easter message of hope, joy and the promise of new life. It may even be that for some the imposition of relative isolation and restriction has meant the discovery of new depths and colours in the good news of the resurrection of Christ.

As we enter Ascensio[n]tide and reflect on the disciples waiting and watching and praying in the holy city, we have space and time to join Christians across the world in praying *Thy Kingdom Come*. There are many good resources, prepared by the national *Thy Kingdom Come* team and by our Mission Team here in the Diocese, to help you and your parish to engage in prayer and service. Do use these days to pray for the fruitfulness of the mission of God across our communities and our world and to do small acts of service to show God's love to those around you. You can find the Diocesan resources, which have been especially adapted to take account of the current situation, at <https://southwark.anglican.org/tkc>

This is also very much part of using this season of Ascensio[n]tide for a personal pause. Jesus instructed his disciples to wait and to pray and during this period. I hope that you will find time each day to do just that and please particularly use some of this time to consider your own wellbeing.

As I have said, I am very grateful for the inspiring work that has been going on in parishes and chaplaincies across the Diocese. The way in which we have taken our services and communities online has been creative and caring and has not only enabled

many people to stay connected to one another and to a pattern of prayer but has also reached out to welcome others who are not usually part of our worshipping communities. There are countless examples, too, of generous engagement with our local communities, not least in supporting the most vulnerable.

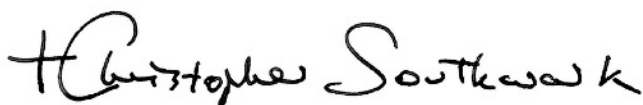
I fully realise that these last weeks have not been easy and I am sure that there will be those of you who are feeling very tired, especially if you have not had much of a break since January. Unfamiliarity and feeling uncertain about the future are always tiring and so it will not be surprising if we do find that we are struggling at times. It is, therefore, good to take time to take stock, and consider how we are doing. Doing so is also a way of being accountable to one another and of ensuring that we are properly equipped and able to continue to serve and care for others; enabling them to be better able to support their own wellbeing.

Some helpful resources have been published and we have sought to make them available through our Coronavirus Task Group bulletins and on the Diocesan website. In due course we will bring them together in a 'wellbeing box' on the front page of the Diocesan website. In the meantime, I have listed some of them and provided links at the foot of this letter. I am also attaching some very insightful spiritual reflections prepared by John-Francis Friendship which I am sure you will find helpful.

If you have particular concerns or needs for support, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your Area Dean or your Archdeacon. They are there to help and can point you to resources and support. You might also find it helpful to look again at the **Wellbeing Leaflet** that we produced some months ago. You will find some excellent information about practical help there. Again, there is a link to it at the foot of this letter.

I have been keeping closely in touch with the Area Bishops during the lockdown and they join me in assuring you of our prayers and good wishes. We are happy to be contacted if we can be of any assistance or simply for a chat.

With thanks for all that you are doing and my prayers for you all during this culmination of our Easter journey as we await the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost breathing I pray new life into the Church and equipping us to be joyful and loving in the Lord's service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Southwark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun

The Bishop of Southwark

## Useful links and documents

Please do refer to the document from the Revd John-Francis Friendship [which can be found here](#).

The initial findings of the Church of England's Living Ministry Project known as **Thrive** has identified six key strategies to help people to consider their wellbeing. There is a description of each on their website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/ministry-development>

- Tune your life to healthy rhythms
- Handle **expectations**
- Recognise times of **vulnerability**
- Identify **safe spaces** to be heard
- **Value and affirm**

Considering these may help us to consider our own wellbeing, and indeed the wellbeing of our congregations and communities. It might be helpful to take one aspect each day in the days of Ascensiontide and to pray and **reflect** on that theme in your own life Or, more simply, why not take time to reflect on the Benedictine invitation to embrace **stability and balance** in your life. You could, for example consider, the following *Prayer, Work, Leisure, Exercise, Study, Relationships and community, Service of others, Silence, Personal formation*. Thank God for each gift that makes up your life and seek to nurture that gift in you and in others. Ask whether one aspect is dominating the other, seek to find that balance and rhythm that is healthy and life giving.

The **Diocesan Wellbeing Leaflet** can be found at <https://southwark.anglican.org/downloads/resources/clergywellbeinghandbook2018.pdf>

You might like to look at the excellent documents prepared by St Luke's, health care for clergy, in its **St Luke's Virtual Wellbeing Programme**. <https://www.stlukesforclergy.org.uk/st-lukes-virtual-wellbeing-programme/> .

In addition there are two useful documents on the Church of England's website <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches#na> scroll down to documents. :

- **Wellbeing of clergy and lay ministers during the coronavirus pandemic.**
- **Guidance on mental health and wellbeing and Coronavirus**

As we also consider the wellbeing of congregations it would be worth reading the wisdom that *Tragedy and Congregations* has produced. **Guidance for ministers as the crisis deepens** is here <https://tragedyandcongregations.org.uk/2020/03/24/guidance-for-ministers-as-the-coronavirus-crisis-deepens/> .