



From the Bishops of Southwark, Croydon, Kingston and Woolwich to the Licensed Clergy, Lay Ministers, and Churchwardens of Southwark Diocese

A pastoral letter from your Bishops to be read and circulated in the churches of the Diocese on Sunday 11 August (Trinity 11)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We write in response to the terrible tragedy of the murder of three young girls in Southport last week - and the subsequent violence that has erupted throughout our nation over the following days.

We are heartbroken for those girls, for their families and those injured in the attack. We are heartbroken, too, to see how this terrible crime is being used by some people to stir up racist violence and hatred on our streets. The riots and racist attacks of recent days are a smear on our nation - they are neither patriotic nor Christian. Violence is not a legitimate form of protest and has no place in our society.

We condemn both these actions and the poisonous rhetoric of those who seek to stir up hatred and division. We stand with those who feel targeted - especially our Muslim brothers and sisters and those who are seeking asylum on our shores. We stand with people of peace from all faiths and none - and we commit ourselves to working together to challenge racism and hatred wherever we find it. Jesus was himself a refugee - and the commitment to welcoming the stranger, uplifting the downtrodden and supporting the marginalised lies at the very heart of our faith. We are ready and willing to offer support and care to those from any community or background who have been affected or feel scared by what is happening.

We pray for the families of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice Dasilva Aguiar. We pray for the children and adults injured in the attack. We pray for the community of Meols Cop, as they come to terms with what has happened.

We pray, too, for our nation and our leaders - for wisdom, peace and justice. We pray for all who are afraid - especially those who fear becoming the target of violence because of their ethnicity, heritage or faith.

In Southwark Diocese, we rejoice in our diversity - which is a gift of God for the enrichment of his Church and his world. We encourage people across our communities to share in this joy, to resist division and respond to one another with care and kindness. Christ teaches us that perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18) - and we ask all in our churches to commit themselves afresh to live out this reality for their communities - now more than ever.

For our clergy and all in local church leadership: be assured of our prayers for you and your parishes. Please do what you can to keep yourselves and others safe - and don't hesitate to get in touch with your Area Dean, Archdeacon or members of the Diocesan Staff team if you need additional support.

Reporting hate crime is the first step to bringing perpetrators to justice - if you have witnessed or experienced hate crime of any kind, you can report it immediately by speaking to a police officer or calling 101. In an emergency, always dial 999. Hate crimes can also be reported [in London via this link](#) and [in Surrey via this link](#).

We ask that you share this letter with your congregations this Sunday - and we thank you for your partnership in the Gospel.

With our prayers and blessing,

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun
Bishop of Southwark

The Rt Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallett
Bishop of Croydon

The Rt Revd Dr Martin Gainsborough
Bishop of Kingston

The Rt Revd Alastair Cutting
Bishop of Woolwich