

News from
the
South East
Local Area



**LETTER FROM THE
RECTOR**
JEREMY WORTHEN



CHURCHES UPDATE
ANDREW BROWN



BIBLE STUDY
ANDREW BROWN



Letter From the Rector

Rev. Jeremy Worthen

Restrictions. It's a word that I've heard a lot, said a lot, and written a lot since March last year. Restrictions on travelling, meeting, hugging; restrictions affecting family, work, and leisure – and church too. We all know it's necessary, and we're all longing for it to be over.

A remarkable programme of mass vaccination has just begun, raising hopes for the day when the restrictions imposed to stem the spread of the Coronavirus can finally be lifted. But that's not going to happen for a while. Life is going to have to carry on under significant restrictions for some time, including church life.

In my December message, I wrote about the importance of watching, waiting, and listening together for how God is at work here in Ashford and how he is calling us to be part of His work. Since then, the PCC has agreed to embark on 'Mission Action Planning' as a way to do that. It's an idea that's been around in the Church of England for a while, and its aim is to help churches organize their life together so that they share most effectively in God's mission in their community.

Ordinarily, we might have looked to get things started by holding a big Parish away-day, with lots of activities and enticing refreshments. Restrictions mean we can't do that, but there are still plenty of things we can do. Gathering people from across the Parish to talk and pray together online is in some ways actually easier than trying to do it in person.

So this Lent, for the first time we're going to be holding a Parish Lent Course. Called 'Church – What's the Point?', it's designed to get us thinking about key questions to do with Church and mission, as well as about how we can follow Christ more faithfully in our own lives. There'll be more details coming soon, through regular weekly news sheets and on the website. It's just four sessions of an hour each, with a choice of slots at 2 p.m. or 8 p.m. on Wednesdays, beginning on the 24th of February. We're thinking too about ways in which those who're not able to make those slots can still be involved.

I really hope you'll be able to join us. I'm aware that for some of us, life is pretty overwhelming at the moment, and taking on anything new is going to feel difficult. That's partly why we've tried to make sure the time commitment is limited. And we hope this can be a supportive space for those who may be struggling.

Our Churches Update



Following the announcement of the latest national lockdown on Monday 4 January, all Sunday services are now online using Zoom until further notice. The Local Leadership Team agreed to move services online until further notice. For full details about how to join using Zoom please contact the parish office.

I'm planning to be at every session and will be giving a short talk each time. We're also intending to spend half the time each week in small groups of around seven or eight, generally with people from the same congregation, so that there are plenty of opportunities for listening to one another. I'm looking forward to seeing what comes out of those discussions.

'I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,' Paul writes to the Philippians (4.11). That's not because Paul has mastered the power of positive thinking, but because he knows that he always has Christ, that Christ always has work for him to do, and that Christ always equips him for that work, whatever the circumstances. Whatever the restrictions.

Since Christmas, Jeremy has been sharing in Sunday worship and other activities in the South East Local Area. He'll continue to be with us through February and then after that be moving to a different Local Area for a while.

Online Services.

As the Pandemic has continued we have been thinking and planning about what we can offer to our congregations online and are now happy to say that a number of opportunities have now come to fruition.

Monday

9:15: Morning Prayer on Zoom.

5:30: Informal Prayer Group on Zoom

Saturday

9:30: Morning Prayer on Zoom

(Lay Led Service for which volunteers are needed)

Sunday

10:15: Sunday Service of the Word



Bible Study / Lent Course.

We are very happy to let you know that our Wednesday Bible Study has had a great uptake but sadly we have now reached our capacity. If there is continued interest and you have not been able to get onto the list for Wednesdays please do let Andrew know so that we can plan for after the lent course. The Lent course is due to start the week after our current Bible study course finishes and will be open to everyone. A little introduction below:

We'd like to invite every member of our churches to join in our online Parish Lent Course, 'Church - What's the Point?' This has been specially created to aid us in our current situation and in the questions it's been raising for us. There will be four separate sessions, one each week lasting an hour, with the option of staying on for some further conversation. You can choose between two meeting times, an afternoon at 2 p.m. or an evening at 8 p.m (first session Wednesday 24th February). More information to come over the next couple of weeks. To register a place contact Phil on 07595 925752 or phil.sibbald@ashfordchurches.co.uk, or let Libby know.

Thank You's.

The South East Team would really like to thank everyone who has continued to support our local food bank. The contributions during this pandemic have been greatly appreciated by those who receive our deliveries.

We would also like to thank our IT team as we move back to online services from home for their continued support.



Office Opening Hours.

Just a polite reminder that the Parish Office is not open during the weekends and Libby's working hours do not extend into the evening unless an emergency arises. Her Office Hours are below and if you need to ask a question beyond these times please use email and she will respond to you as soon as she is able.

Monday - Friday: 9:00-16:30

Pastoral Care

If during this time you are in need of support or a conversation please do not hesitate to get in contact with us. We are always available to have a conversation or offer prayerful support. If you know of anyone who is particularly struggling from our Church family please do let us know so that we can make contact with them.

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