

Ebbsfleet Newsletter

March 2023

In this edition:

- A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Rob
 - Advertising for a new PA for Bishop Rob
 - Documents from Bishop Rob
 - Regional Meetings in 2023
 - Ebbsfleet in the North?!
 - A special tribute to Naomi Teasdale
 - “Standing Together in Faith”
 - Bishop’s Diary
 - Prayer Requests
 - Bishop’s Staff Team & Contact Details
-

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Rob

Dear friends,

Psalm 11:3 asks a great question: “*When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” David asks it because around him are people telling him to run away from the danger of the wicked– “*Flee like a bird to your mountain, for look the wicked bend their bows... to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart!*” Instead David holds on to three truths that give him confidence not to flee, but to find refuge in God (v.1).



First, **remember the Lord is still in charge!** V.4 We can hold on under pressure knowing that he holds on to us. Even if we are called to suffer for Him, we are never out of His care. Second, **remember the Lord will judge us all!** V.5-6 We are not the ones who will decide the final fate of things, He will! Judgement is a comfort to us when we see good work being frustrated. Third, **remember the Lord will bless his people.** V.7 *The upright will see his face.* We are living not for the fleeting successes of this world, but the glories of his eternal presence. We are to work for fruit that will last for that day! In the end, David’s first word in the Psalm is his last word to us: ***In the Lord I take refuge!***

Those words have been a comfort in the tumultuous a month since my consecration; with the synod narrowly voting for the bishops’ proposals for prayers associated with the Living in Love and Faith project. While the foundations of biblical faith in the Church of England have not yet been destroyed, not least because the synod resolution not to do anything ‘indicative’ of a change in doctrine stands; yet many public comments have made it sound as though they have been undermined. And that confusion is something that has already changed the relationship the Church of England has to the

majority membership of the Anglican Communion in the GSFA and GAFCON, which is a particular grief that should humble us. But between now and July, the production of the 'pastoral guidance' will certainly make these confusions clearer one way or another, as the obvious questions about appropriate sexual practice will need to be resolved, key legal questions resolved, theological 'nuances' explicated and 'provisions for conscience' clarified.

So what do we do for now? Psalm 11 calls us to have the confidence not to react or run when we face such a crisis, but rather to make God our refuge. In practice, I'd suggest it means the following:

1. To find our refuge in God's presence – Our praying is one of the instrumental means of grace, God uses it to change things. Historically when God has sent revival as a way out of a crisis in the church, it has been preceded by heart-felt corporate prayer, in repentance and faith. I have been heartened to hear of groups of ministers now covenanting to meet weekly on Zoom to pray together – it is a vital foundation for a faithful response to a crisis. You might also consider joining in with the Church Society's "60 days of prayer for the Church" <https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/60-days-of-prayer-for-the-church/>. *Who are you meeting to pray regularly together in response to how we feel about these things?*

2. To stand together as God's people – One of the checks and balances God has blessed us with in His church, is each other. Although it can be tempting to express our concerns unilaterally, but to be 'Church' is to stand together faithfully not just as a singular minister or congregation, but with others (*remember it's two or three witnesses called for by Scripture*). In this context, working with other churches, ideally under the CEEC umbrella and through local DEFs, is vital. (See <https://ceec.info/keepingfaith/>) You'll find a brief account of the blessing that standing together has been to four local churches in Chelmsford later in this newsletter - a great example I'd encourage others to follow. *How can you work more closely together with other churches as you respond to these concerns?*

3. To speak up for God's Word – Our calling has not changed, to proclaim the gospel inside and outside the Church, to share and show God's love so that lives are transformed by His truth and grace. Our previous newsletters and the CEEC guidance have articulated very clearly why the proposals about the Prayers of Love and Faith cannot be supported, and need to be resisted for the sake of the unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity of the church and its mission. But the challenge is to speak up about these things in Jesus'-like way, so that those struggling with their brokenness or sin find the grace and help that saves and changes lives – even the most vulnerable of sinners felt safe when led by our Saviour! And it also means us teaching more clearly and passionately the glory and beauty of the gift of marriage that God has given, as we can no longer take for granted that people are clear what the Scripture or Church teaches. *Have you been explicitly preaching and teaching the grace and truth of the biblical understanding of human relationships in a way that helps equip the whole church to stand by it wholeheartedly?*



There are many other pastoral and practical questions that have now arisen, a couple of the most common I have mentioned below; but I am happy to help give further guidance and support to any who would value it. A number of people found it helpful a few days ago to join me for an open Zoom conversation. I am offering a further opportunity to do so on the afternoon of **Thursday 30th March from 1-3pm**. You are welcome to ask questions or share reflections at

that. If you are interested in joining in, send an email to the office admin@bishopofebbsfleet.org for a Zoom link. In addition, if you would like a more confidential meeting or call, to share concerns more openly, similarly contact the office and we will make those arrangements.

All of the above reflects the depth of grief and concern that so many of us are feeling at the moment, so I hope it will galvanise us to prayer, action and closer fellowship. But in the midst of preparing this, I had a message from a single mum who lost her baby pre-term 12 months ago, and I was privileged to help her arrange the funeral, deal with her partner's unfaithfulness and her autistic son – not a church contact, just someone in the community who felt so lost and helpless reaching out to the church was her last resort. It was a timely reminder that it is the lowest and the least, the beaten down and broken that we often don't see, the mission fields that Jesus seemed so often to notice when others ignored or even despised them. That's why we need to secure the gospel foundations of our faith, but also why we need to cultivate in us the gracious gospel heart of our Saviour for the lost around us. They are why we have a Church of England in the first place – the lost of England who need our Saviour! Let's help each other keep that main thing the main thing amidst all the other challenges we are called to face!

Yours in His service,



Advertising for a new PA for Bishop Rob

Bishop Rob is seeking to appoint a highly professional and experienced Personal Assistant to support him in his role. Further details can be found online via the Church of England's Pathways site at <https://pathways.churchofengland.org/job/pathways/4065/pa-to-the-bishop-of-ebbsfleet>

Please pass these details on to anyone you know who might be suitable for this role.

Documents from Bishop Rob

It may be helpful to be aware of two short papers written recently by Bishop Rob:

1. A short paper entitled "Bishops – impaired fellowship and licences?", which emerged from conversations Rob has had with various ordinands in recent weeks. The document can be downloaded at <https://www.bishopofebbsfleet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Bishops-impaired-fellowship-and-licenses.pdf>
2. A brief response to some Frequently Asked Questions regarding the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, which is available on request from the Bishop's Office (admin@bishopofebbsfleet.org).

Regional Meetings in 2023

We are now able to release the dates for the Regional Meetings, to which we invite key leaders, ordained and lay, from those with a complementarian theology to come together. These are ahead of the General Synod on July and will hopefully help us prepare for that in a united way.

Please note: all meetings run from 10am till 4pm.

1. **Wednesday 10th May in London** – Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3DW for those in Chelmsford, Ely, Europe, Norwich, Oxford, St Albans, and St Edmundsbury & Ipswich Dioceses (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ebbsfleet-regional-meeting-london-10th-may-registration-567925038077>)
2. **Thursday 25th May in London** – Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3DW for those in Canterbury, Chichester, Guildford, London, Portsmouth, Rochester, Southwark and Winchester Dioceses (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ebbsfleet-regional-meeting-london-thursday-25th-may-registration-569255306947>)
3. **Thursday 8th June in Leyland** – St Andrew's Parish Church, Church Rd, Leyland PR25 3EL for those in Blackburn, Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and York Dioceses (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ebbsfleet-regional-meeting-manchester-thursday-8th-june-registration-569289017777>)
4. **Tuesday 13th June in Derby** – St Giles Church, 209 Village St, Sunny Hill, Derby DE23 8DE for those in Birmingham, Coventry, Derby, Leicester, Lichfield, Lincoln, Peterborough, Southwell & Nottingham, and Worcester Dioceses (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ebbsfleet-regional-meeting-derby-tuesday-13th-june-registration-569344684277>)
5. **Thursday 15th June in Exeter** – St Leonard's Church, Topsham Rd, Exeter EX2 4NG for those in Bath & Wells, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, Hereford, Salisbury and Truro Dioceses (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ebbsfleet-regional-meeting-exeter-thursday-15th-june-registration-569350762457>)

As well as the conferences, we are hoping that +Rob will be able to personally meet with the ministers of all the resolution parishes over the next year, individually or possibly in diocesan groups. If that would be helpful sooner rather than later, contact the office.

Ebbsfleet in the North?!

Thank you to all who have been interested in my housing situation – as I write I am I think technically a squatter in the Rectory of Cheadle – but the good news is that the Church Commissioners have agreed a house for us to live in in Chester Diocese, and hopefully we will be able to move sometime after Easter.

Why Chester? When on the Dioceses Commission reviewing the role for the +Ebbsfleet (not expecting I'd be it!), we strongly encouraged all the Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs) to be better 'embedded' in a particular diocese, so as to have better access to support for HR, legal advice, and for the possibility of more regular fellowship within a Diocesan team. While this was not able to be arranged for the +Ebbsfleet role in a formal way in the timescale, I was keen to follow that up informally.



I am very grateful to +Mark Tanner in Chester for extending that informal invitation to me, not least because Chester Diocese is as central as any (when the resolution churches range from Newcastle to Plymouth), it is only 2 hours by train to central London (when they are running!), and has excellent motorway links both north-south and east-west, so allows for flexibility when driving.

A new office base? As part of the arrangement, my new PA (which is being advertised now!) would be based alongside the PA's for the other Chester Bishops, which will give them better daily fellowship and support, and help for when holiday cover is needed. It also helps that I am well known in Chester Diocese, having served 3 terms as Chair of the House of Clergy, and of the Mission and Evangelism (Outreach) committee. It was also a way to make tangible the fact that, although technically a 'southern' suffragan of the Archbishop of Canterbury, I am called just as much to the northern province as well.

Finally there are also some advantages from a family point of view in not being too far from my recently widowed step-mother, and wider family. And in the end the chips are better in the north! But if you are venturing on a visit to the Chester area, feel free to make contact and if I'm free you'd be welcome to pop in for a coffee.

A special tribute to Naomi Teasdale

I am sad to announce that from the end of month, Naomi Teasdale will be stepping down from the Ebbsfleet Team. Naomi has been serving as the Administrative Assistant for the Team, initially supporting Rachel Lickiss and +Rod, but has been a key member of the Ebbsfleet team during the vacancy and as we have begun to get established. I am hugely grateful for all of her help and patience with considerable changes, and holding fort at the old Maidstone office in Southwark, which will be relocating to the Chester area at the same time. We will be sharing the new contact details for the office later this month.

We are now advertising for the full-time PA post to be based in the new office in range of Chester, so watch out for more information if you know someone who might be interested.

Standing Together in Faith



Colin Taylor, Vicar of Felsted in Chelmsford Diocese, writes: "In 2016 Holy Cross Felsted worked together with other likeminded parishes in North Essex to start a pattern of a weekend away together every two years. In the intervening years we have arranged a day conference together consisting of teaching in the morning and all age activities in the afternoon ending with a hog roast. We typically have 150-170 of us, of all ages, coming together.

Sitting under God's word together is reason enough to have a weekend away or day conference, but we are also deliberately trying to build gospel resilience amongst semi-rural and small town churches in the area so that when pressures and challenges come, as they now have, we would know who our friends are. Key to this is developing relationships across the parishes that are deep and broad. Deep

in that we have repeated meaningful personal interactions over time and broad because the relationships go beyond the clergy or smaller number who would attend joint training events.

We have just had our 4th weekend together, which Bishop Rob was able to attend, and are exploring how we might think through and co-ordinate aspects of our LLF responses as a North Essex ReNew Hub.”

Bishop’s Diary

What has Bishop Rob been up to?

One of the challenges of the past weeks has been establishing the legal and safeguarding paperwork from dioceses to enable my ministry in parishes. Each diocese of the 32 of 42 in which there are resolution parishes has slightly different arrangements, so it is taking a little time. So far, the legal processes have been completed in Sheffield, and Lichfield, and are formally underway in London, Chelmsford, Ely, Manchester, Liverpool, Chester, Southwark, and Oxford, and informally in Birmingham and Derby. The remaining dioceses I hope to follow up next month. This has slightly delayed our ability to respond to invitations for visits and confirmations, but we will be starting confirming those as soon as we can.



Meanwhile, here is a flavour of what Rob has been doing in the first six weeks since his consecration Thursday 2nd February:

- 6th February Speaking at the Pre-Synod meeting for Church Society
- 6th-8th February Speaking at the Fellowship of Word and Spirit conference on Leadership
- 10th February Standing Commission Meeting re the Five Guiding Principles
- 13th February Preliminary Meeting with +Sheffield
CEEC online
- 14th February Pastoral meeting in Sheffield Diocese
- 16th February Meeting w Director GFA UK
- 18-19th February North Chelmsford ReNew Churches weekend away
- 20th February GAFCON meeting
- 21st February Meeting students at Oak Hill College
- 23rd February Interviews for Associate minister at Harold Wood
- 24th February Preliminary Meeting with +Chelmsford
- 27th February NCI induction
Preliminary meeting with +London
- 28th Feb – 2nd Mar New Bishop’s Development Team training
- 6th March Preliminary Meeting with +Ely
- 7th March SE Bishops meeting in Southwark
- 8th March Chester Association
- 9th March Pastoral Conversations via Zoom
National Church Vision Team meeting
- 14th March College of Bishops briefing meeting

Looking ahead, here are some highlights from the Bishop's Diary

15 th -16 th March	Church Society Council residential
16 th March	Preliminary meeting with +Warrington Pastoral meetings in Liverpool Diocese
18 th March	Sheffield Diocesan Synod and formal licensing
19 th March	Preaching at Holy Cross, Gleadless Valley (Sheffield Diocese)
20 th March	Dundonald Church elders meeting
23 rd March	College of Bishops meeting – following up on the General Synod vote
26 th March	Preaching at Central Church, Warrington (Liverpool Diocese) Visit to Emmanuel, Wimbleton (Southwark Diocese)
27 th March	Visit to All Souls, Langham Place (London Diocese)
30 th March	Meeting with the CEO of CPAS Pastoral Conversations via Zoom

Prayer Requests

Please give thanks to God for:

- the appointment of Rob Munro as the new Bishop of Ebbsfleet
- the opportunities Rob has had to meet with bishops, clergy and lay leaders
- the faithful ministry of Naomi Teasdale in the Maidstone / Ebbsfleet office

Please pray for:

- Rob's various diary commitments, listed above
- completion of Housing – a possible house has now been identified, subject to practical arrangements/surveys etc. Pray also for Rob's wife Sarah and youngest son Sam as they make the adjustments that the move will require – and pray for finding a church fellowship which can be a home base to be supported and encouraged in faith.
- for the challenges for the Ebbsfleet Administration Team, with the new full time PA needing to be recruited in the Chester area, and with Naomi stepping down at the end of the month. Pray for the extra load on the Team, particularly Allan and Mark, as we make these adjustments, and for a smooth transition to new arrangements.
- for the wider Pastoral Team – Mark Wallace, Carrie Sandom, Mark Burkill and Dick Farr as they support the on-going demands of liaising with the churches and various workers and ministers during this time of transition.

Bishop's Staff Team & Contact Details

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