



Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney
Scottish Episcopal Church
Newsletter – Wednesday 3 March 2021
From the Bishop

Recovery and Renewal

The needs of the churches as we emerge from the pandemic.

*The topic of 'Recovery and Renewal' was discussed in groups at the Diocesan Synod.
The Dean offered the following as introduction to this part of the agenda.*

As we begin to focus our attention upon the prospects of recovery and renewal, I quote the inspiring words of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah:

*"Those who wait for the Lord shall
renew their strength, they shall
mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they
shall walk and not faint."*

Isaiah 40:31



Hearing those words whilst we still are in the midst of a global pandemic might seem not only naively optimistic but also out of touch with our contemporary reality.

In contrast to those uplifting words from Isaiah, I suspect that many of us actually feel quite weary and rather faint. Not only are we tired of walking through this Coronavirus pandemic but we find it difficult to imagine having enough exuberance and energy to soar like an eagle. Right now we find ourselves simultaneously in a place of longing and of apprehension. We are longing to be released from this ongoing pandemic and all of its restrictions, yet we also are apprehensive about the new variants popping up and possibly throwing yet another unexpected spanner into our eagerly awaited "road out of Lockdown."

Our human inclination is to wish away the bad and the difficult stuff of life, but that cannot be. When the old year of 2020 was passing into history a couple of months ago, we hoped earnestly that 2021 would bring deliverance for us from this Coronavirus pandemic which has so dramatically and tragically affected nearly every aspect of our daily lives. As Hogmanay approached I frequently heard people expressing “*good riddance*” to 2020. How greatly we all were looking forward to being able to have real face-to-face, person-to-person encounters with our friends and loved ones. Yet here we are in 2021 having to hold our Diocesan Synod online via the medium of *Zoom* because Covid-19 (in some even more infectious mutations) also entered this New Year with us.

When we commenced another national “*Lockdown*” just as 2021 was beginning, I must admit it seemed that the long “winter” of this ongoing Covid pandemic was not abating. Quite simply release from the exhausting ordeal of this pandemic was not coming soon enough to satisfy me. Unfortunately the much-anticipated brighter future that I was eagerly awaiting did not come to fruition when I wanted it to appear at the start of the New Year.

It is perfectly natural to become somewhat depressed by the constant repetition of bad news, and during this past year who amongst us has not occasionally felt a wee bit “down” at times? It is easy to become discouraged when so much in life still is very far from being “*normal*” for any of us. But in every hard or difficult time that we experience, those words from the prophet Isaiah remind us that we can place our hope in God who comforts us, sustains us, raises us up and accompanies us on every step of our journey through **and** out of Lockdown or anything else that life shall ever throw at us. Throughout this pandemic we have endeavoured to continue living as faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ: striving to remain steadfast in ongoing prayer and worship. No matter what sort of restrictions and limitations were placed upon us in an effort to contain the Coronavirus, how wonderful it is to know that there was absolutely no constraining the liberating power of the Holy Spirit who has been working in some new and surprising ways within us and amongst us.

Admittedly we still are in a protracted season of waiting for all of the Covid restrictions to end and for life as previously we enjoyed it to return once more. But let us ask ourselves this question: “*Is God calling us to go back to how we once were?*” Could it be that this sobering experience of being immersed into a global pandemic actually is an occasion and an opportunity for transformation: of ourselves individually, as charges, as a diocese, as a province, and as a nation? The conversations that we shall have about this are not merely for discussing how we can recover all that we once had and enjoyed. Instead we are being asked to think about how we might recover living more fully into the call of Jesus Christ for each one of us to be his disciples. Only then will recovery also be able to become renewal.

Not only are we being called to think about “recovery and renewal” but we also are invited to dream about it. Yes, you are invited to “envision” what it really means to live daily as the Body of Christ in such a way that the Light and Love of God is unmistakably visible in all that you say and do. This pandemic has taught us some amazing and exciting

new things about ourselves. As individuals, as charges, and as a diocese we are not the same now as we were one year ago, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. Some of what Covid-19 has brought into our daily existence we can hardly wait to jettison, and quite rightly we can say *“good riddance”* to such stuff. But there are other things, not previously in our repertoire, that have proven to be of benefit and value and they should be retained.

Many of us, myself included, have become weary of enduring this challenging season in which we have found ourselves due to the entrance of a new virus into our midst. That weariness is exactly why we need to rely upon our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: quite frankly we cannot pull ourselves out of this pandemic by our own strength. But the good news is that we do not need to do it by ourselves. Hope and strength are available to us through Jesus, within whom is the one sure certainty that lifts us aloft on *“wings like eagles”* and moves us forward into that renewal to which God invites all of us as we grow into greater *“Christlikeness.”*

The first chapter of Saint John’s Gospel says, *“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.”* No matter what gloom and doom scenarios may arise someday even in a future post-Covid world, none of them ever need to throw a permanent spanner into our summons as Christ’s disciples to experience recovery and renewal. If we keep company with the One whose glory is the brilliant Light that pierces through even the darkest experiences of life, then we shall indeed walk without fainting and soar to lofty heights as the eagles.

As we begin to emerge out of this pandemic the time ahead of us looks to be quite demanding. But quite honestly it always has been rather demanding being a disciple of Jesus since there is a definite costliness to taking up our cross and following Christ. However we need not be daunted by what confronts us because God is with us, and that is why we shall be able to *“mount up with wings like eagles”* – ascending into new ways of serving our Lord and Saviour. Although Covid-19 temporarily pulled the rug out from beneath our feet and even now is keeping us *“socially distant”* during this Diocesan Synod, we shall recover our balance. As a Church we will run again and not be faint or weary because the Lord upholds and strengthens us. As we move forward together, growing in our knowledge and love of God and our service of one another, let us stick close to the Saviour who is our deliverance and our salvation. And when the going gets tough and it feels too much to bear any longer, remember that you are never alone – Jesus Christ is with you! In him is our hope, our strength, our transformation and our renewal as God’s beloved people.

Written by the Very Revd Dr Dennis B.A. Berk, Dean of Aberdeen & Orkney

Matthew 6:7-15

The Bishop’s Charge to Synod can be found in the ‘News’ section of the Diocesan Website, and at:

<https://aoepiscopal.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bishops-Charge-to-Synod-2021.pdf>

Provincial & Diocesan Worship

Sunday 7 March – Lent 3

11am: A celebration of the Eucharist led by the Rt Revd Andrew Swift, from Brechin

Sunday 14 March – Lent 4

11am: A celebration of the Eucharist led by Rt Revd Ian Paton from St Andrew's, Dunkeld and Dunblane.

Links to the services are found on the Scottish Episcopal Church website.

Other services

Details of services live-streamed or broadcast by churches across the province are available from the churches' websites and facebook pages.

Bishop's Lent Appeal 2021: 'I was hungry and you fed me.'

We have been aware for some time how the pandemic is impacting individuals and families trying to manage on low or unreliable income. One result of the present uncertainty has been the increase in food-poverty. This is rightly something that we should all be aware of, and as individuals and congregations we can make a response.

My Lent Appeal this year encourages support of food charities, food banks and community projects to encourage healthy eating. I would be grateful if vestries could give some time to deciding how they might be involved in this.

As in previous years, churches might decide to donate locally (food items or financial donations). Individuals or churches can also send Lent alms into the diocesan office.

Monies given to the diocese will be divided between:

Fetlar Community Garden – this is a new initiative on Fetlar, Shetland, with which the Revd Graham Booth is involved. This project will enable the local community to grow food together in a new garden on the island, using raised beds and polycrubs to extend the growing season.

Aberdeen Cyrenians – who support many of the poorest people in the city and north-east region through donations of food and essentials.

+Anne

This newsletter comes as a PDF,
and an on-line copy can be read on the Diocesan website.

The date of next issue will be:

Wednesday 17 March 2021

I am always delighted to receive contributions, which could be news, poetry, history – whatever is interesting to you, and might be to others.

Please send your news to me at : bishopanne@aberdeen.anglican.org