



Ash Wednesday, 6 March 2019

Dear Friends,

This comes with thankfulness to God for you all as we begin the journey through Lent, praying that you will be spiritually refreshed by the opportunities this season brings for personal growth in our faith and ministries.

I have recollections from my childhood of attending some Quaker meetings with my mother. Sitting in silence is not an easy discipline for any young person to learn, especially this teenager. As a young Christian I loved being part of the action, seeking to make a difference. I realise now that I associated silence with feelings of loneliness and isolation, being rejected by a friend or punished by a parent. Yet I distinctly remember that some of the faces of the people scattered around the Quaker meeting house were not lonely or disengaged, they were waiting attentively, expecting to meet with God. From time to time one would offer a bible reading, another a prayer or simply a word of encouragement. The silence had become for them a familiar spiritual pathway through which they had learned to encounter God's living presence.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, the spiritual writer and social reformer, once said "*True silence is a key to the immense and flaming heart of God.*" I am a slow learner when it comes to exploring this discipline, but still determined to find ways for it to become a more integrated part of my pattern of prayer and ministry, perhaps especially through Lent.

As we seek to nurture others in the journey through Lent, growing disciples with deep roots of faith in God, on a personal level I would encourage you to explore a new spiritual discipline, or rediscover one that you valued in the past but may need to recover. Read a little around it, but not too much, far better to practice it and help clear a new pathway of the soul that will help us walk more closely with the Lord.

Dallas Willard wrote extensively on the spiritual disciplines, inspired by a conviction that they needed to be removed from the category of historical curiosities and placed

at the centre of the new life in Christ. These disciplines include solitude, fasting, service, meditation on Scripture, and confession. Over the past few months I have been travelling with a group exploring new possibilities and patterns for spiritual formation that might enhance our work through the Younger Leadership College, including our popular intern programme. This will help shape 'chapter two' in the vision for growing many more younger disciples, learning to live and lead like Jesus wherever they find themselves.

Dallas Willard put it very starkly,

*"The world can no longer be left to mere diplomats, politicians, and business leaders. They have done the best they could, no doubt. But this is an age for spiritual heroes - a time for men and women to be heroic in their faith and in spiritual character and power. The greatest danger to the Christian church today is that of pitching its message too low."*

To follow Christ in every sphere of life is the highest of all callings. We need this to be reflected not only in our evangelism but also in our formation of disciples, as we draw on the practices that can help someone seeking to walk in the way of Jesus. It is not simply about making more effort but learning those spiritual rhythms and patterns that help people grow in grace with deep roots in Christ. Every part of the church has something to contribute in this.

In due course I look forward to sharing more of how we are shaping the Younger Leadership College as we move into a new chapter.

### **YoungLIFE with Pentecost Celebrations – Friday 7<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June**

I am very thankful for the levels of energy, vision and commitment among the 26 parishes or benefices that are part of the YoungLIFE learning community. The goal is towards each making a step-change in ministry to and with children.

You may also know there has been a review to consider how the Discipleship and Ministry team can be structured in a way that enables new models for supporting youth and children's work, drawing further on the best practices on the ground in the diocese as well as wider national resources. You will have heard from Nigel Spraggins that the restructuring has already resulted in some changes and a redundancy. I want to pay particular tribute to the tremendous contribution that Nick Harding has made to the life of the diocese over 17 years. He has been a source of immense encouragement and inspiration to those leading among children in our churches and schools. I am grateful that he will continue to be involved in safeguarding training, as well as some particular aspects of children's ministry training in which he remains a national leader.

As part of the YoungLIFE initiative I am looking forward to hosting special Pentecost Celebrations at Bishop's Manor on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June for schools and Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> of June for children and families from across all our churches. More information will follow, with an excellent team preparing to lead these events, which are also linked with 'Thy Kingdom Come'.

### **Chrism Eucharist in Southwell Minister – Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> April, 7.30pm**

As we prepare to remember and celebrate the momentous events of Holy Week and Easter, I look forward once again to the Chrism Eucharist in Southwell Minister. In the light of Holy Week we renew our vows as those entrusted with lay and ordained ministries in the diocese. I know it is another evening in an already busy week but your presence on this occasion is a gift to your sisters and brothers in Christ, as the only occasion in the year when we all gather in our Cathedral.

### **Bishop's Study Day – Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March**

Finally, I look forward to seeing many of the licensed clergy and licensed lay ministers next Tuesday at the Lent Study Day led by the Revd Will Van Der Hart on "*Flourishing: In Life, In Ministry, In Mission*". I am certain this will be an encouraging and supportive day together, very appropriately meeting in a place where people come from around the country longing for rest in a frantic world where there is 'no time to stand and stare'. It is easy to say we know the ultimate source of rest for the soul, but too often we are living lives every bit as hurried and disorientated, so I pray the day will be a blessing to us personally and in the whole-hearted gospel ministry we share in the diocese.

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul" with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter. A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature.