



2nd April 2020

Dear friends

To everything there is a season: Ecclesiastes 3

Some of you will know that I have been signed off from work since breaking my femur in mid-January. This led me to be confined to home – largely one room – for 8 weeks after leaving hospital. It also coincided with the increasing realisation that the world was facing a challenge which we long knew was possible, but never truly imagined happening. Now we are all living with confinement, sometimes for our own health but more often the health of others, particularly the most vulnerable.

We are also living with uncertainty – when will the ‘lockdown’ end, or will it be extended? When will things return to normal, and what might the new ‘normal’ be like? As those entrusted with a critical role in the well-being, growth and development of our nation’s children, you are all key workers, and not simply for this season but the season which will come once the pandemic crisis has passed. Today and into the future (as you have always done) you will be nurturing our children so that whatever ‘normal’ might become for them, they will not simply survive but flourish.

In these days, we are being helped to notice and better appreciate the difference so many people and professions make to the health of our society. The NHS may be in the vanguard, but those ensuring our supermarket shelves are full are now being seen through a different lens. Valuing the contribution that others make can change the whole climate of a society, and this is learning which we need to treasure in shaping the season to come.

With only children of closely defined key workers, or those at risk, now permitted to attend school, I hope and pray it will be an opportunity for fresh appreciation of the incredible role schools play in the health of society through you: your staff, Governors, and support services. Your school is a local hub for the wellbeing of community life which needs recognising, properly resourcing and cherishing. In writing here I hope you will receive this as my own appreciation and applause for all you are to us, a gratitude shared by Bishop Viv, my colleagues in the Education Department, our Board of Education and the ministers and congregations across the Diocese. We are hugely grateful for you, and to you.

The season ahead, which none of us can foresee, will bring new challenges. Perhaps seeing a challenge as an opportunity to do something you would never otherwise have considered may help embrace it positively; it has certainly helped me. As a Church School, you have a foundation in Christian life and practice which can hold together the most daunting of circumstances. The Covid19 pandemic and its impact rightly leads Christian people to intense Lament. Yet we are not left in despair because death and disease will not have the last word. We may be unable to celebrate Holy Week and Easter together in our schools or church buildings but, paradoxically, God might help us catch a greater sense of what it means to be Easter people.

After breaking my femur, for two months I was not allowed to put weight on the leg until the bone had repaired. Now three weeks into the rehabilitation phase, discipline, patience and constant practice are required to reactivate unused muscles and those damaged by the surgery. God's grace has been helping me through this tough season; but more importantly I see God's grace at work in spades as colleagues have risen to much greater challenges. In this testing season, may you be able to see that grace at work in your home, your school, your life and the unfolding future.

With my gratitude, prayers and Easter greetings

Lee

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