

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Bishop of Dover, Rose Hudson-Wilkin, have written this letter to parishes in the Diocese of Canterbury following the latest Covid-19 restrictions.



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*Feast of the Epiphany 2021 ^ ^ ^*

Dear friends,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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We greet you with the same comfort and joy that was shared with you as 2020 drew to a close. It was an unprecedented year of highs and lows; a year that began with the usual expectations and New Year's resolutions, most of which escaped our grasp as COVID-19 took hold of our nation some three months in.

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Many of us who thought we had no technical skills have been surprised by our abilities to learn how to do things differently — like leading our congregations online in digital worship. We dug deep when we could not enter our buildings and from what felt like a disaster have come some real blessings as 'church' truly came home — and we were able to pray and worship with others from our living rooms and at our kitchen tables. The Easter message came home to us very clearly, too: Christ is risen, not locked away in buildings but on the road with us, wherever we are to be found.

The presence of the risen Christ with us has given us a boldness that enables us to —be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.— This vision of Christ is alive and we have, by the grace of God, found innovative ways to reach out to the communities we are called to serve.

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The virus has brought with it the three main drivers of stress; novelty, uncertainty and uncontrollability. None of us have ever faced such a time before. We are constantly faced by news — medical, epidemiological, economic, political — which makes us uncertain. The forecasts of the future are proving wrong and we face unpredictability. Long periods of such stress are very demanding on our health, physical and mental, and on our emotions. We ask you to be aware of these pressures and to take care of yourselves and each other. Nothing is new to God, nothing is uncertain, nothing is unpredictable.

Let us renew our daily prayer, our reflection on scripture, our periods of silence and resting in the presence of our Lord and Saviour. Such disciplines have genuine physical as well as spiritual and mental benefits. Please ensure you take proper days off. Spend some time on things that are good, exercise in the cold air, talking to friends and family on the phone and despite lockdown, reading a favourite book, watching an old and favourite film. Look for the familiar amidst novelty, spend time with the certainty of others' love and care, even over zoom. Choose and control some aspects of life. Of such things are health and resilience made.

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We would like to thank each of you - lay and ordained - for all that you have been and all that you have done during such challenging circumstances. We are truly grateful for your faithfulness, your commitment and your partnership in the gospel. We are also grateful to you for the sacrifices you have made for the sake of the gospel during 2020. This New Year has begun where the old one left off with COVID-19 virus wreaking its damage in our communities. We are filled, nevertheless, with hope that the vaccines now being rolled out ^ offer us light at the end of this tunnel.^

We would also like to remind you that, while churches ^ may ^ remain open for public worship and prayer, you are not required to do so where you feel that ^ would be unsafe or unwise. We know that you will have been considering these issues for quite some time - please ensure that the wellbeing and protection of ministers and church officers continues to be taken into consideration during this time.^ We are aware that this is a time of enormous stress and strain, so please reflect prayerfully, take time over your decisions and listen carefully to one another.

Throughout this all, please remember that the ^ Bishop's Office, diocesan team and archdeacons ^ are here to support you - and do ^ inform the Bishop's Office ^ and your archdeacon of any decision to close your building.

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So, thank you once more for persevering and please be assured of our daily prayers for you, for your families and for those you serve.

Yours in the service of Christ,^

Justin and Rose signatures

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**Archbishop Justin and Bishop Rose**

The Most Revd and Right Hon Justin Welby

*Archbishop of Canterbury*

The Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin

*Bishop of Dover*

6 January 2021

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**Source URL:** <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/letter-archbishop-justin-and-bishop-rose-canterbury-diocese>