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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

'...encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all ... Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.' (1 Thess 5:14-18)

I recently attended a talk given by Pastor Agu Irukwa of the black majority Jesus House Church. I was especially struck by his description of how churches in Africa and the Caribbean gather together to pray. He said it was usual and expected that every Friday night churches would gather to spend the whole night in prayer. He said that very often the needs about which they were praying were very direct and personal (eg safety in travel, access to medical help and so on) and that in the UK the black majority churches were having to learn to pray for wider concerns. I couldn't help but be challenged by their wholehearted dependence on the power of prayer. By comparison, our efforts to gather our congregations for one hour's prayer once a month looked tiny. I know it takes continuing effort to encourage congregations to gather for prayer, but I do hope that we can make the most of the 'Thy Kingdom Come' prayer initiative after Easter as well as specific calls to prayer such as that of the Christian Institute which has set aside 7th – 13th April as a week of prayer for various issues affecting society and our gospel freedoms within it. Individually, in all my own activity, I struggle to put 'quality' time aside for prayer, but I am convinced of the need for it. It will help us with our temptation to be impatient when people seem slow to grasp gospel truths; it will help us reflect on all we have to be thankful for; and it will help relieve us of anxiety (as Philippians 4:6 reminds us) as we bring our concerns over the future direction of the Church of England to him and freshly realise that He is in charge of his church.

Completion of the First Series of Regional Events

We have now completed our first two-year cycle of seven regional events. These have been attended by a total of 300 clergy and laity drawn from the 138 evangelical 'resolution' churches as well as from clergy who are themselves complementarian and are serving in churches which have not passed resolutions. The regional events have got better as they have gone along – certainly to judge by the feedback I have received. The very first event in February 2018 made it clear that people did not need to spend time hearing about the various arrangements and issues in different dioceses if these could be turned into written briefings instead. As a result, subsequent events had more written briefing, with discussion taking place on the basis of two think pieces. In the most recent events, these were 'A biblical pattern for women's ministry and how this works in practice' and 'What does mutual flourishing mean for us?'

Most of the feedback has indicated that it was very helpful to think through how we are putting complementarian convictions into practice. In particular it was helpful to see the basis on which individual clergy draw lines about involvement in various types of ministry as well as to discuss how we can visibly encourage women in ministry. There was a lot of discussion too about the issue of sexuality and the different responses to apparently revisionist developments.

At the end of each event, there was a session for curates who had completed at least one year of training. This was designed to cover two practical issues: what a 'Word-based' ministry looks like outside the pulpit, and how to present complementarian convictions when applying for incumbencies. A total of 20 curates attended these.

Overall, there was increasingly positive feedback as the series of events progressed and although some wanted to meet more frequently, it seems like one meeting every two years per region strikes the right balance. As a result, the next two-year cycle will start in January 2020. As soon as we have set dates we will publicise them so that you are able to hold the date for your regional event. If you would like to be invited to the next meeting in your area and fall into the category of clergy whose church has not passed a resolution, then please let Naomi know by emailing her at: office@bishopofmaidstone.org *If you were invited to the last meeting there is no need to get in touch again as we will have kept your details on our records.*

Grace Church Greenwich gets its BMO

At the end of last month Grace Church Greenwich was recognised as a BMO and its ministers were licensed by the Bishop of Southwark. This was the culmination of a two-year process and although it has been very lengthy, it represents a significant development within the Diocese of Southwark. This is because historically, church planting initiatives have not been well received in the diocese and doctrinal considerations have also been something of a hurdle. However, when the Bishop of Southwark appointed me as an Assistant Bishop, new possibilities for episcopal ministry opened up. At the same time, the diocese was keen to make more progress with planting initiatives and appointed Canon Will Cookson as Dean of Fresh Expressions.

As a result, some of the Grace churches which had been planted out of St Helen's Bishopsgate, were enabled to pursue BMOs. Now that Grace Church Greenwich has successfully moved into this position, it is hoped that others will follow. Although consultations with local deaneries take time, there is every hope that the sort of structure established for Grace Greenwich will be replicated for others, thus considerably shortening the process.



Grace Greenwich licensing as a BMO - From left to right: Rt Revd Dr Karwei Dorgu, Bishop of Woolwich; Rt Revd Rod Thomas, Bishop of Maidstone; Revd Dr Andrew Sach, Pastor, Grace Greenwich; Revd Dr Andrew Latimer, Senior Pastor, Grace Greenwich ; Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark; Dr Mosun Dorgu; Venerable Alastair Cutting, Archdeacon of Lewisham & Greenwich

Sabbatical

I will be taking a sabbatical from the beginning of April until the end of June this year, 2019. This will necessarily reduce my availability throughout the year for confirmations and other engagements. If you would like a confirmation in 2019 or early 2020, please let Rachel know once you have made plans and she will work to organise things to include as many requests as possible. This will be much helped if churches in a locality have a shared confirmation service and if you can be as flexible as possible concerning dates. If you had been hoping to invite me to a meeting of your PCC during the week, then during the period April-June please consider inviting David Banting instead. He is a member of General Synod and is hugely knowledgeable about the House of Bishop's Declaration and current developments in the Church of England. As the recently retired vicar of one of our larger evangelical churches, he is also very skilled in advising on relationships within Dioceses. David can be contacted via my office.

Vacancies

From time to time I am made aware of vacancies and of those seeking a new position. Please continue to let Rachel know if you are advertising a vacancy or seeking a ministry position. Particular requests have recently been made for the following vacancies. Full details are available from Rachel at: admin@bishopofmaidstone.org

- A Families Worker at Christ Church Lowestoft, whose role will be to develop and implement a Family Outreach Strategy. This is a full-time post offering a salary between £19,000 and £25,000.
- A Pioneer Associate Minister to join the team at St Giles' Church, Normanton by Derby in order to lead outreach within the Blagreaves area of Derby. The post is for an ordained Anglican. Closing date 14th April.

Prayer Requests

1. Thank God for positive and helpful regional meetings as well as insights into how we can best encourage both men and women in their ministries.
2. I am hoping to work on the whole issue of how evangelicals and the wider Church of England should be responding to each other over their developing positions on sexuality. Please pray for Godly insight as I do this.
3. The House of Bishops meets in May. Please pray that they will respond to the recent concern over the guidance concerning the use of the service for 'Affirmation of Baptismal Vows' to mark gender transition.
4. David Banting is deputising for me on the House of Bishops' Implementation and Dialogue Group – which is looking into ways in which 'mutual flourishing' can become more of a reality in the Church of England. Please pray that he will be able to encourage them to grasp difficult nettles – not least the issue of senior appointments.
5. In a number of dioceses some churches are in impaired communion with individual archdeacons over the actions they have taken which appear to have been at odds with the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexual relationships. This is complicating arrangements in some areas such as ordinations and the handling of vacancies, both of which I am involved with. Please pray for Godly outcomes.

List of Resolution Parishes

A list of the 139 conservative evangelical parishes which have passed resolutions is attached at the end of this newsletter. Please let us know if we are missing any.

All that remains is for me to wish you all a very joyful Easter season

With love

Rod Thomas

**Resolution Parishes - resolutions passed by conservative evangelical churches,
28th February 2019: 138 resolutions**

Bath&Wells	St George, Wembdon	Emmanuel Hastings
Birmingham	St Agnes, Moseley St Stephen/St Wulstan, Selly Park	Holy Trinity, Eastbourne Little Common, Bexhill
Blackburn	All Hallows Bispham All Saints Preston Christ Church Blackburn Church of the Saviour Blackburn Padiham St Andrew, Blackburn St Andrew, Ashton on Ribble St Andrew, Leyland St Bartholomew, Ewood Wellfield Church	Derby Little Eaton St Alkmund, Duffield St Giles, Normanton St Mary, Chaddesden St Peter, Stapenhill St Stephen, Sinfen Trinity Church Buxton
Canterbury	All Saints, Loose Christ Church, Ramsgate St James, Westgate	Ely All Saints, Little Shelford Christ Church, Cambridge Christ Church, Huntingdon St Andrew the Great, Cambridge St John, Orchard Park St Matthew, Cambridge
Carlisle	Houghton and Kingmoor St Bridget, Moresby St James, Burton in Kendal St John, Hensingham St John, London Road, Carlisle	Europe Leipzig
Chelmsford	Becontree, St Elisabeth Chadwell, St Mary Christ Church, Leyton Crossway Stratford Fordham Henham, Elsenham and Ugley Holy Cross, Felsted Immanuel, Brentwood St George, Dagenham St John, Walthamstow St John, Great Clacton St Michael, Braintree St Paul Harold Hill & St Thomas Noak Hill St Peter and St Paul, Dagenham St Peter, Harold Wood	Exeter Christ Church, Paignton St Leonard, Exeter St Matthew, Elburton
Chester	Christ Church, Wharton Holy Trinity Poulton Lancelyn St Catherine, Tranmere St John, Hartford St John, Over St John, Lindow St John, Knutsford St Mark, New Ferry St Mary, Cheadle Toft	Guildford St Andrew, Frimley Green & Mytchett
Chichester	All Saints Crowborough All Souls Eastbourne Bishop Hannington Hove	Leicester Enderby Holy Trinity, Hinckley
		Lichfield Audley Castle Church, Stafford Holy Trinity, Oswestry St Luke, Wolverhampton St Thomas, Kidsgrove
		Liverpool St Philemon Toxteth St Simon and St Jude Southport
		London Christ Church, Cockfosters Christ Church, Mayfair Euston Church Grace Church, Highland St Anne, Limehouse St Benet, Paul's Wharf St Botolph without Aldersgate St Helen, Bishopsgate St John, Downshire Hill St John with St Andrew, Chelsea St Luke, Hampstead St Michael, Cornhill St Nicholas, Cole Abbey St Paul, Hadley Wood St Peter, Cornhill St Peter's Barge, Limehouse St Peter, Fulham St Thomas, Oakwood

Manchester	Christ Church, Chadderton St Mary, Balderstone
Norwich	Christ Church, Lowestoft St Andrew, Honingham
Oxford	Arborfield Barkham Christ Church, Wokingham Holy Trinity, Nuffield St Ebbe, Oxford St Mary, Maidenhead St Paul, Banbury
Peterborough	St Peter and St Paul, Moulton
Portsmouth	St James, Ryde
Rochester	Christ Church, Bromley St John, Tunbridge Wells St Nicholas, Sevenoaks St Peter, Bexley Heath St Peter, Tunbridge Wells
Salisbury	St John, Wimborne
Sheffield	All Saints, Darfield Christ Church, Endcliffe Christ Church, Fulwood Holy Cross, Gleadless Valley St Andrew, Kendray St Mary, Wheatley St Thomas, Kilnhurst
Southwark	Dundonald Emmanuel, Wimbledon Grace, Greenwich Holy Redeemer, Streatham Vale Holy Trinity, Wallington St Luke, Wimbledon St Nicholas, Tooting St Stephen, South Lambeth
Southwell	St Mary, Wollaton Park
St Albans	All Saints, Riseley Holy Trinity, Frogmore
Truro	Fowey
Winchester	Christ Church, Westbourne Sherbourne St John, Basingstoke St Mary, Basingstoke
York	St Andrew, Kirk Ella, Hull