



The Diocese of Southwark

The Bishop of Southwark

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun

Trinity House
4 Chapel Court
Borough High Street
London
SE1 1HW

Epiphanytide 2021

s 020 7939 9420
f 08432 906894

To All Clergy in the Diocese of Southwark

e bishop.christopher@southwark.anglican.org

www.southwark.anglican.org

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

The Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call 2021

When I wrote to you this time last year with my Lent Call for 2020, few of us could have been prepared for the year that would follow. In early March, the Dean of Southwark, The Very Revd Andrew Nunn, and I were in the Holy Land with an ecumenical group of pilgrims from our own Diocese and from the Archdiocese of Southwark. As we returned to England, our trip slightly curtailed because of the pandemic, none of us could have predicted how quickly we would be plunged into lockdown and all that that has entailed.

During the first lockdown and in the time since, the churches and people within our Diocese have been magnificent as they have found new ways to be together and to continue to worship. But, more than that, they have continued to reach out to those in need in their local communities. Indeed, in many cases the work that the parishes have been doing to support the vulnerable, those who are lonely and those who find themselves without food or shelter, has increased.

That is why my Lent Call for 2021 focuses on the work of food banks in our Diocese and food insecurity in places where we, as a Diocese, have strong links: Zimbabwe and the Holy Land. Our Diocesan Links with four of the five Dioceses in Zimbabwe is well known (and as you will also know, we have strong ties too to the Diocese of Harare which is linked with the Diocese of Rochester). We have had firm bonds with our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem for many years and I regularly take part in the Holy Land Coordination as the Anglican observer with my Roman Catholic brother Bishops. But from 20 January this year we will have a formal Link with the Diocese of Jerusalem, just as we do with the Dioceses in Zimbabwe. That is why this year we are focusing a week each on food insecurity in these troubled places where many of our brothers and sisters find it hard to ensure that their families are fed.

I have taken as the theme of my Lent Call “...have compassion” from Mark 8. In this passage, Jesus looks on those gathered around him who have come to hear the Good News and realises that they have nothing to eat. The Disciples bring him the little food that the members of the crowd have and Jesus feeds all of them and there is food over. This familiar story reminds us that Jesus cares for people's physical needs as well as their spiritual ones, as we should too.

Jesus has compassion on those who have been with him, saying, “If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way – and some of them have come from a great distance.” For many in our own communities and Link Dioceses, not having enough to eat is sadly and appallingly now a regular occurrence. I urge you all to pray for those in these situations and to consider prayerfully what you can give to help to support them.

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I know that many of you reading this will have been affected by the effects of the pandemic upon our economy and upon our physical and mental health, and my prayers are with you all as you seek to find encouragement and hope at this difficult time. But I know too that some have more time and are spending less as we are unable to go out and pursue our usual activities, and I want to encourage you all to a generosity of spirit both in prayer and resources. Please do give as much as you can to support the work of these food banks in our Diocese and crop production and feeding projects in our Link Dioceses.

As you will know, the lockdown hit our churches and schools in the middle of Lent and as a result my Lent Call raised only about a quarter of what it usually does. This has meant that we have had much less money to send to our Link Dioceses and the other projects that we featured this year. My brother Bishops and I hope that we will be able, once again, to be generous to our featured projects in 2021 as we all, like Jesus, show compassion for those in need of food in today's world.

It is possible to give to the Lent Call online as well as by cheque, which should be sent to John Jackson at Trinity House. As well as information concerning the projects we are supporting, and further information on how to donate, you will find enclosed worship sheets for use in schools or Sunday Schools. Do also follow our social media feeds during Lent for more material about the projects.

I hope and pray that you will want to display this material and encourage those in your churches to pray and to give as part of their Lenten discipline. Please encourage them to use the sheet contained in this material each week to consider their response to the reading and the project.

I very much hope as well that you will find these resources useful as you encourage those in your care to use Lent well and to give generously to the Bishop's Lent Call.

With my thanks and prayers for all that you do and for our partnership in the Gospel,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Southwark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun
Bishop of Southwark