

Thursday, February 19th 2026

Dear Sisters and Brothers across The Diocese,

Pastoral Update to the Diocese of Guildford

Beverly and I cannot begin to express our thankfulness at the tidal wave of love, prayer and good will that has swept us along since I sent out my last letter earlier this month. We are only sorry that we've not always been able to respond as we would wish. It's wonderful to know ourselves so upheld and supported by thousands of people around the diocese, the nation and beyond; and whilst many of the messages have once again sent the tear ducts into overdrive, they've been tears of gratitude more than grief, or a bit of a mixture. We feel particularly moved too by the Vigil of Prayer that has been organised for us next Monday, including the evensong that day which I pray might prove a time of profound worship and fellowship in the presence of the living God.

I promised that I would update you on further developments and am sorry to report that the prognosis has got worse not better. In a salutary meeting with a consultant oncologist last Thursday, we were told that the tumour on my pancreas is of a very unusual kind, an 'adenosquamous carcinoma', which is peculiarly aggressive and difficult to manage. As a result, a potential course of chemotherapy will probably cause more harm than good, and the hospital has effectively passed me over to the care of the local hospice team. 'So how long might I have to live?', I plucked up the courage to ask. 'You'd be doing well if you were still alive in a month's time', was the sobering answer.

Only our good Lord knows exactly how long I have left, of course. But that conversation – together with a sense that I am getting a little weaker by the day – means that my main focus now is on 'cheerfully persisting towards a good death', so that yesterday I signed a deed of delegation, handing over the interim leadership of the diocese to our dear Bishop Paul. I'm sorry that that means I will no longer be honouring my existing commitments, and my chaplain Jo and PA Andrea will be working through my diary to make alternative arrangements with those affected.

I don't fear the prospect of dying and find to my relief that my faith in the 'resurrection of the body and the life everlasting' has only grown stronger over the past few weeks. I've sometimes had private worries that, when faced with the starkness of a terminal diagnosis, my faith in the Risen Christ might falter. Well, it hasn't. Or better still, *God* hasn't faltered. Quite the reverse.

Nor do I feel short-changed by what's happening. Of course, I have grumpy patches when I'm in pain or not sleeping properly (I'm only a 'saint' in St. Paul's most generous definition of the term!). But I still consider myself as deeply blessed to have been born into such a loving family, to have met with Christ as a teenager, to have spent nearly forty years of my life so joyfully married to the 'wife of my youth', to have raised four remarkable children (all equally remarkably partnered), and to have been entrusted with a series of fulfilling ministries within my beloved Church of England. I would encourage us all to pray for Archbishop Sarah in her daunting new responsibilities. Sarah paid me a welcome pastoral visit yesterday and shares with me a deep sense of the beauty of our Church, even amidst its disagreements and failings.

Of all the closing words to St. Paul's various letters to individuals and to church communities, perhaps the one I value most comes right at the end of his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. We sense that the apostle is running out of parchment, and wanting to cram as much as he can into the last few inches; and he does a great job from my perspective, beautifully articulating so much of what I would want to say in what may well prove to be my last message to the Diocese of Guildford.

Could I encourage you to read these words quietly and prayerfully – individually, of course, but also in a PCC or governors' meeting – so that each one of us, lay and ordained, might be freshly inspired to embrace God's call on our lives with renewed vigour and gratitude:

We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Every blessing,
+ Andrew.