

# DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND



## **Letter to St. Thomas à Becket, Hamburg - From your Archdeacon**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

This comes to you with warm greetings at the beginning of the new year 2021.

It seems hard to believe that it is little over a year ago that Julie and I said farewell to you. On that memorable occasion a big congregation had come together in the beautiful church. We could see, speak to and take leave of each other in person. No one anticipated the radical change a tiny virus would soon bring about to the manner in which we can meet, worship and share in congregational life.

That occasion of leaving STàB meant the end of one chapter in your life as a congregation and also for me as your chaplain. It meant the beginning of a new chapter and role for both sides. What no one anticipated was that from the spring months of 2020 we would be facing the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic as it rolled over our whole world. As Archdeacon for Germany, the North and the East in the Diocese of Europe I abruptly had to change gear from a schedule of intense travel which included far-flung chaplaincies, for example in Rumania, Greece and Turkey, when I could meet and greet people eye-to-eye and face-to-face and share their joys and concerns. Since then, almost overnight, I have been in contact only per phone, email and, inevitably Zoom. Thank God, we could all resort to these media, and they have been great tools in keeping us together.

In this manner I have also been following the fortunes of St. Thomas à Becket, taking pride in the way in which the life of the church has been creatively taken forward by the wardens, the chaplaincy council, the director of music, the church choir, numerous volunteers, and not least through the committed ministry of a number of locums, who have even explored the possibilities of electronic pastoral encouragement. You have all rallied under the ever changing orders and restrictions that have been imposed under Covid, acknowledging that they served the best

interest of checking the spread of the virus and the eventual return to our accustomed way of life.

No doubt it has been a very trying time – for each individual and their families and for the congregation as a whole. I won't reiterate what we know and what has been rehearsed over and over of how the virus and the consequent measures taken to check and conquer it have impacted every aspect of our lives. I just want to convey that this has been a burden on my heart. More particularly, however, I want to encourage you not to lose heart.

Sadly, during this period some social media have been used to spread doubt, fear and disinformation. The temptation to lend ear to such false and misleading theories is often beguiling. To believe a vague sinister theory of evil forces at work or clutch at facile responses to the pandemic, which deliberately ignore the line that science and responsible leadership have laid out, may be an easy way to vent genuine frustrations. But to embrace and share such beliefs is, to say the least, imprudent.

Our Christian faith teaches us to keep our eyes on *"Jesus Christ ... the same yesterday and today and for ever"*. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews goes on to say: *"Do not be led away by strange and diverse teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace...."* (Hebr. 13.8,9). This grace of God found its profoundest expression in God sharing our human lot. Despite all the restrictions, we have this past Christmas again celebrated the truth made manifest in the fragile baby in Bethlehem. The great tidings for all time is: **"Fear not!"** Taking this source of courage to heart we move forward with confidence - through the experience of sorrow and suffering - towards Easter.

Already there are the signs of a new dawn. The St. Thomas à Becket family can look forward to Revd Jules Barnes coming as its new chaplain by March of this year. With her taking up the reigns all of us look forward to the beginning of a new vibrant chapter in your chaplaincy. Personally, and God willing, I look forward to being with you for her induction on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

With my continuing prayers and blessings.



The Venerable Dr Leslie Nathaniel

23.01.2021