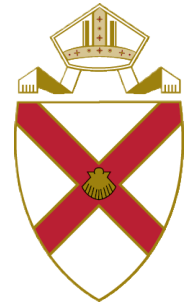


THE BISHOP OF ROCHESTER

The Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs



A pastoral message from Bishop Jonathan at this time of unrest.

Sent on behalf also of the Bishop of Tonbridge, the Dean of Rochester and the Archdeacons of Bromley & Bexley, Rochester and Tonbridge to all Licensed Clergy, Lay Ministers, Churchwardens and PCC Secretaries.

7 August 2024

Dear sisters and brothers,

Like so many, I have been shocked and horrified by the violence and disorder that has been spreading across our nation.

The opportunistic and appalling criminality that has used the tragic deaths of three young girls in Southport – Alice, Bebe and Elsie - to perpetrate division and violence is abhorrent. My heart breaks for their families and their friends, and I continue to pray for them in their loss and for all those who have been affected by what has happened.

There is absolutely no place in our society for the violence we have seen and for the racist targeting of minority communities and those of other faiths. The events that have been taking place are to be condemned and deplored, and I stand with all those of faith and none who are working for peace in our communities.

Those whipping up hatred do not represent the true nature of the communities in Medway, Kent, and Bromley or Bexley. Indeed, one of the things that struck me most when I first became Bishop, and which I continue to cherish, is the wonderful diversity and energy of the people in this place.

I know many will be afraid as we learn of the possibility of events being planned locally. Therefore, I urge calm and peace, and for us to all focus on what unites us. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbour as ourselves and shares a vision of the kingdom of God in which we are all valued and respected for our individual humanity.

I am praying therefore for those who are working to hold our communities together, for our emergency services, for our local government, community and faith leaders. I pray comfort and peace too for all those who have been left injured, afraid, or anxious.

For all clergy and those in local church leadership, I give thanks for all you will be doing at this time to promote cohesion and unity in your areas.

Please do what you can to keep yourselves and others safe - and please don't hesitate to get in touch with your Area Dean, Archdeacon or members of the Diocesan Office team if you need additional support.

Reporting hate crime is an important way to bring perpetrators to justice - if you have witnessed or experienced hate crime of any kind, you can report it immediately by speaking to an officer or contacting police via 101. In an emergency, always dial 999.

May we all know peace and wisdom in the coming days, as united together, we come through these times.

With my prayers and blessings

Jonathan, Bishop of Rochester