

### **Romans 15 v13**

**'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the holy spirit'**

Dear Colleagues

I do hope that you had some time to rest and relax at Christmas although I am more than aware that the end of this holiday became very disrupted by wider events.

I am writing to you today at the start of another lockdown. I make no apologies in sharing a verse I have shared with you in the past 12 months but which, I think, is particularly relevant to the circumstances we face. That verse is Isaiah 41:10

'Fear not, for I *am* with you;  
Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.  
I will strengthen you,  
Yes, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

As we prepare our plans for the coming weeks, I think these words have a particular resonance. For me the phrase "Be not dismayed for I am your God" stands out. As I have watched the situation worsen over the last few days, I have experienced a sense of dismay coupled with that familiar sentiment of "Here we go again!" However, I recognise that this is not the same challenge that we faced last March. At that time we had little knowledge of the virus we were facing and the sense of fear in all levels of society was obvious.

Whilst I would never be foolish enough to underestimate the challenge we have ahead of us now, we do have the enlightenment of science with us as the vaccines are being rolled out. This brings with it a hope of returning to a normal life eventually. Facing the uncertainty of the next few weeks can be balanced a little more by the hope of progress towards the management of this virus. However, as Christians we have much more. We have the knowledge that God is with us, we have the knowledge that God will strengthen us and we have the knowledge that God will help us.

Over the last few months many of us will have experienced exactly those things in the challenges we have faced. Our faith is often grown through challenges and trials and I hope that you have had some experience of that as God has demonstrated his faithfulness, love and care for you.

As schools we have carried out invaluable roles in our local communities. We have been places of stability, continuity, love, care and competency. We have achieved all this over the past nine months and we can draw on the strength of that and the experience we have learned as we move into this new phase. I do not underestimate the tiredness, the impact on morale and the challenge imposed to all in your school community but God is with us. He will strengthen us. He will help us and he will uphold us.

In the meantime, our own team returns to the way we operated in the first lockdown. Church House is largely closed and we are working remotely from each other. We have found ways of carrying this out effectively and our School Effectiveness Officers are fully available. They are busy trying to contact you all over the next few days.

Our online training programme will continue but other events such as the Headteachers Conference in March and the Leavers Celebrations are on hold as we watch the unfolding situation. We will keep you posted as time goes by.

At this point I would like to welcome our new Headteachers who have joined us:

- Marianne Brand – St Lawrence CE P School, Hurstpierpoint
- Mia Lowney – St Andrew's High School for Boys, Worthing
- Michelle Lord – St Paul's CE P School, Brighton
- Lisa Harris – Rumboldswyke CE Infant School, Chichester

I would like to welcome them into our family of church schools and assure them of our ongoing prayers. If one of these new headteachers are local to you, please do make contact in these early days as we all know how important the support of our immediate colleagues can be.

I have added to this E-News Bulletin a letter from Nigel Genders who is the Church of England's Chief Education Officer. He has obviously been very close to the unfolding political situation over the past few weeks and I think he offers words of wisdom and encouragement which focus us on our reason for being very effectively.

Please be assured of our ongoing prayers.

Trevor Cristin  
January 2021

**Learning with meaning and purpose: to know God and shape the world**