

The Archdeacon of Maidstone

The Venerable Estella Last
The Archdeaconry, 4 Redcliffe Lane, Maidstone ME14 2AG
Tel: 01622 934 449
Email: archdeacon.maidstone@diocant.org



The Diocese of
Canterbury



**To all beneficed and licenced clergy, Lay Chairs,
and Churchwardens**

14th February 2026

Dear all,

Today marks a month since my first day in office as the Archdeacon of Maidstone. Thank you to all those of you who have been praying for me as I take up this role. If I haven't managed to meet you yet on my rounds of the Archdeaconry, please bear with me. So far I have worshipped in 4 out of the 5 Deaneries, and will be joining a service at St Michael's in Sittingbourne at the beginning of next month to complete the set. Whilst writing I should add that I won't be available for the next week or so as we are (at last!) moving to Maidstone over half term and I am very much looking forward to settling here with my family.

January has been long and wet and miserable but little glimpses of hope in the form of snowdrops have sparked through the damp and gloom as February has dawned. I know from passing them on my travels around the Archdeaconry that many of you have carpets of these beautiful little symbols of hope in your churchyards.

This past month, I have really enjoyed beginning to learn some of your stories as I get out and about in the Archdeaconry and most of all hearing your hopes for your churches, parishes, and the people you serve. Many of you have been engaged with Mission Action Planning and I hope the process of coming up with your 'Three Things' has been life giving. If you need help with anything please do get in touch either with me directly or with Lynn my PA and we will do our best to assist.

As Lent begins, having barely left Parish ministry myself I know firsthand how irritating it can be when an Archdeacon or someone suggests that Lent is a time for slowing down so I'm not going to tell you that. You will do what works for you I am sure. I also have no idea what Lent will be like for me, no longer being in a Parish. This is another of the new things that comes with a new role. Lent has a reputation for being sombre and self-denying but at its root is the aim of drawing closer to the God who loves us. The 40-day period remembering Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness which follows the moment of his baptism when he hears the voice of God which calls him 'beloved'. Since today happens to be 'Valentine's day' and more importantly, as Lent begins, I wonder if we can live into our own belovedness?

Christian spirituality tells us that from the moment we were merely a thought in the mind of God, each of us were marked "beloved" as the very core of our identity. Beloved is where we begin. It is who we are, it is who we are called to be in the world. So this Lent, I pray that you can hear the voice of God that calls you beloved. And I pray too, as you prepare for the joyous feast of Easter that you may find the strength and courage to bring the truth of belovedness in God fully to the world and to those you minister among, for in doing this, we might too bring some hope to others.

With my prayers,

Estella Last

The Venerable Estella Last
Archdeacon of Maidstone

