



Nicholas Henshall  
Dean of Chelmsford

20 July 2021

Dear friends and colleagues across the Cathedral Community,

### **REPORTING BACK**

*The findings of the Cathedral Questionnaire*

As part of the process of re-emergence, we have recently been inviting people from across the Cathedral community to complete a questionnaire either on-line or on paper. The purpose of the survey was to find out about the impact of the pandemic, to hear how the cathedral ministry through the pandemic had been received, and to help inform the Dean and Chapter in their decisions going forward.

120 people filled in the survey. Thank you for your time and energy. This high response rate means we can have confidence that the outcome accurately reflects the views of our congregations. Following my address last Sunday I want to report here on the main findings.

#### **1) Who are we?**

The vast majority of respondents identified themselves as Anglican or Church of England (90%). This is surprising, but shows a strong and clear sense of identity from our congregations.

70% attended the cathedral once a week or more before the pandemic and just under 70% identified the 9.30am as the service they regularly attended. Timing and style of worship were both factors in why people chose a particular service (67%). Some members of the community have really missed the 9.30am service and this was reflected in the comments. Most people have missed singing together and the face-to-face contact and socials that were part of cathedral life.

#### **2) Why do people come here?**

There are a range of views and expectations around Sunday morning worship. First, it was great to know that the vast majority (68%) saw cathedral worship as accessible. When asked why they attended the cathedral, a cluster of important themes emerged with similar weighting:

- preaching and teaching (54%)
- the liturgy/style (48%)
- fellowship (47%)
- the building and its ambience (45%)
- the choral tradition (43%)

Over 54% felt that the cathedral enabled them to express their spirituality all the time or most of it, whilst 50% thought that the cathedral did not offer a good range of worship for different spiritualities. There is more to reflect on in this area, but the comments don't add any particular detail. Some have certainly grown in faith and seen their spirituality deepen during this time.

72% of people plan to attend the cathedral the same or more (16%) in the future, with just 11% saying they will attend less. The vast majority are also confident about returning (60% are very confident or confident); only 6% are not confident at all.

In terms of accessing the ministry of the cathedral during the pandemic, 86% welcomed email communication (i.e the Dean's letter, prayer for today, the newssheet), 65% accessed the Sunday livestreamed service and 46% online daily prayer.

Going forward a large proportion are keen to continue receiving email communication (71%) with a good number of others wanting online courses (42%), and live-steamed worship (Sunday service 40% and daily prayer 37%). 60% of people wish to access cathedral worship online and in person in the future. Many have really enjoyed the Cathedral's online ministry, and it has certainly opened up new possibilities.

Whilst recognizing that there are people in our community who do not have on-line access, it was surprising that only a very small number asked to receive the weekly mailing by post.

### **3) Effectiveness of Cathedral Ministry**

47% responded that the cathedral's ministry had been very effective or effective, with 29% ticking the mid point between very effective and not effective at all, 22% did not think that cathedral ministry was effective.

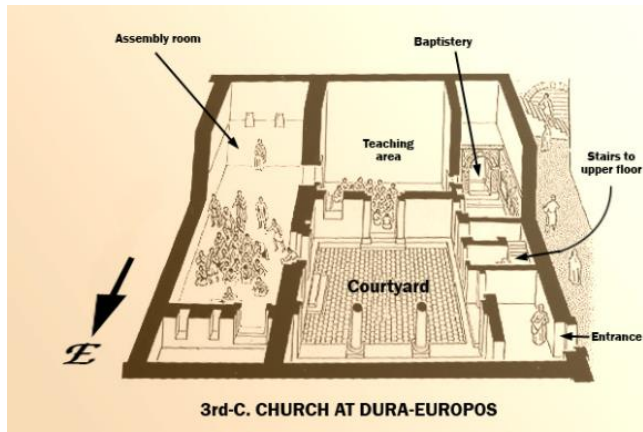
Individual comments suggest some reasons. Lack of face-to-face contact with clergy has been a real problem for a few, especially those who have faced bereavement during the pandemic. Some also feel that more could have been done by the clergy to stay in touch with their congregations. This suggests that we need to understand better as community the roles and responsibilities of Cathedral clergy and how that is in many ways very different from parish ministry.

In terms of how the pandemic has affected people, the overwhelming response was that people needed social contact (72%), with pastoral support (32%), fellowship groups (29%) and teaching and guidance (30%) following behind. It is very clear that the enforced isolation due to numerous lockdowns, home working and more have meant that people are starved of social contact. The Dean's *How are you?* events have been the first step in seeking to address this. The responses also show the need for a service/event where people can gather to mourn:

In terms of the teaching ministry of the cathedral, only 19% wanted to learn more about Christianity, and 51% were not sure. 53% felt that the cathedral helped them live out their vocation in the world, 10% said 'no', whilst 36% were not sure. This suggests some work does need to be done in the area of Christian discipleship, a point I pick up in the last part of this letter.

Overall, the survey gives a rich and varied description of experiences. Some people inevitably have really suffered during the last 18 months, whilst others have grown spiritually and been able to take advantage of creative new possibilities. There is much to reflect on in terms of how the ministry of the cathedral is developed for the future.

Let me finish with some reflections on what a healthy church, a healthy congregation looks like. There are many different aspects to this. Here I simply want to reflect on three key themes: worship, fellowship and learning.



The earliest Christian church building we know of dates from some 200 or so years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is in a place then called Dura Europos in what today is Syria. As you can see from the illustration, it had three many areas: an open courtyard for welcome, hospitality and fellowship; a space for teaching and learning with a font in the next room where new Christians were baptized; and a larger space for worship. Worship, learning and fellowship as the foundation of the church's mission.

When I first heard about Dura Europos, it reminded me of spending a summer in California on a church swap, with my dad as priest in charge of a church near San Francisco. Dad was intrigued that the church owned three buildings, No vicarage of course because that's not how they do things there! A church where we met to celebrate the Eucharist; a parish centre where we then went to eat and talk and laugh together; and then a third building that puzzled us, until we were told it was the Sunday School – not for children, but for the whole worshipping community. Again, worship fellowship and learning as the core disciplines of the Christian community and the foundation of our mission.

With my best wishes to you all.

*Nicholas*



### **THE DEAN'S LETTER & PRAYER FOR TODAY**

The Dean's Letter and Prayer for Today will continue going forward, but there will be a three week break in the daily emails, both because of annual holidays and because the Cathedral Office itself is closed for the first two weeks of August. You can continue to download Prayer for Today from the Cathedral website, and normal email service will resume after 10<sup>th</sup> August.