

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

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Dear Friends,

Many of you will be aware from the news, that the British Broadcasting Corporation, has in recent times, found itself embroiled in some turmoil, particularly regarding the perceived behaviour of high-profile presenters. At issue, is the apparent disparity between personal conduct and public persona; particularly when those in question work for a public corporation that exists through the good will of public licence payers. I do not think any of us would dispute that there should be a right and careful investigation if conduct is called into question, particularly if it is criminal in nature. Amid this, however, we should not forget that ordinary people are at the heart of these stories for whom there is a proper duty of care. Stories of this nature naturally raise questions about personal conduct and what we judge to be acceptable or not, and the criteria by which we make these judgements.

Whilst not wanting to appear censorious or indeed 'holier than thou', the Christian church will have a concern for public morality not least because we are a religion of *virtue*. We believe that at the heart of the Christian message is the great commandment, to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and at the same time (and with the same ardour) to love our neighbour. This represents the ethics and teaching of Jesus Christ, as it is represented in the pages of the Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament. However, this is not a matter of simply *knowing* what is right, instead it is about *becoming* and *sharing* in the goodness of God through a life of imitation and participation. It is a life of transformation through grace as we become the very best version of ourselves and begin to share the likeness of God. It is about growing in the virtue of love through participating in the life of God, the one who is the source and perfection of love. As we grow in this love for God our capacity to love our human neighbour grows exponentially and as we live in love for our neighbour, we experience more of God's love for all things in Creation.

The writer of the Epistle to the Ephesians says at the beginning of chapter five:

'Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...'

Karl Barth famously said, '*there are no epistles in the New Testament, but for the problems of the churches.*' Behind each epistle in the New Testament is the story of a fractious and often broken human community and a community that stands in need of both penitence and redemption. In this sense, the average Christian community, is no different to wider human society, for it is made up of fallible human beings who make mistakes and hurt one another. What is common to each, however, is that we are all made in the Image of God and our highest good and deepest happiness, is to become like God in goodness and love.

I hope and pray that we may all find the resources, in worship, prayer and devotion, to become all that Christ is calling us to be – new creations to the glory of God!

With peace and blessing,

Julian