*One year on: Feeling our way towards recovery and rebuilding* 23 March 2021

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A year ago today the Prime Minister announced the first lockdown. All but essential workers were sent home, places of worship and other public venues closed and we began our crusade against Covid-19. It’s been a bumpy ride. A summer of relaxed restrictions was followed by the alarm of rising rates in the autumn and the introduction of tiers which rapidly became new lockdowns. Next week we hope to begin our way out of lockdown number 3. Watching a third wave rise in Europe, we hold our breath – wanting our vaccination programme to spare us and enable more and more freedom over time.

So, as spring flowers into being and the vaccination numbers grow, I sense a distinctive turn towards hope. People in charge of things are making plans to recover and rebuild. They want to get a handle on this, to control what they can control and to prepare to resume business, as usual if possible.

What will it take for us to recover and rebuild? We are in new territory here and the lay of the land remains lumpy, with hidden hillocks and bogland beneath our feet. There remains significant unpredictability: the possibility of new variants, the effectiveness of vaccination and its take up, the impact of the uneven rollout of vaccines around the world…all of this and more invites a wary caution. In a real sense we do not yet know the full impact of the coronavirus, the losses we will bear or the resources we will have at our disposal. What are we to do? Wring our hands and wait?

Goodness, no. I honour the recovery and rebuilding energy that has arisen. It signals that, as exhausted as many of us are, there is a nascent hope that can sustain and guide us. We have learned a lot over the last year: how to survive and adapt to the changing requirements of pandemic management, the importance of human connection, the fragility of life, and the hidden in plain sight aspects of our life together (economic structure, racism, sexism, domestic abuse, poverty) that make some people more vulnerable than others. I want to take stock of what we have learned into the process of recovery and rebuilding, for it is a process as much as a project.

My gut instinct is that recovery begins with reflection and recollection: reflection about what has happened to us, and recollection of the basic values that we want to shape our rebuilding.

Reflection on the past year enables us to gather up the experience of the many. Asking each other *what have been the heartbreaks of the past year, the challenges and the triumphs?* and really listening to the answers, we learn the true impact of the pandemic. This database of human experience tells us not only about the losses and costs of the past year, but also the learnings and resources we carry into the future. Naming losses, we grieve. Naming challenges met, we celebrate. If and when new challenges arise, we have a sense of skills and gifts we may employ. Our resilience grows.

And we recollect. What are we, as individuals and as organisations, about? Surveying the lay of the land, what is our purpose *for these times*? We may not know how much money or physical resources we will have, but we will have a sense of our capacities, our hopes and our dreams. And coming from a long line of ancestors in faith that have risen from catastrophe, we know that God is and that God will continue to call and equip us to do what needs to be done.

Our attention to one another, to the true impacts of Covid-19 and to resources garnered and gained – through reflection and recollection – will lead us towards the new day, with a spring of hope and the confidence of faith in our steps. God direct and bless our journey towards the new day.