**Bishop Martin Seeley writes…**

By the time you read this, the senior civil servant, Sue Gray, may have published her report on the allegations of parties held by Government officials during lockdown restrictions.

Or she may not have done, now that the police are involved.

I can’t quite see how she will tell us much more than we have been told already, but perhaps she will cast light on who might have been responsible.

The spotlight has been turned by the media on the Prime Minister, asking what he knew and when.

But what has struck me through all of this is that a great deal more people seem to be potentially implicated than just one individual, even if the light does in the end need to shine on him.

Other people in authority must have known what was going on, and if Covid rules were breached someone could have made sure it didn’t happen again.

So I wonder about the sense of responsibility felt by those Government officials who may have been involved.

It does take more than one to make a party.

What happened to people’s sense of serving the good of the nation, and their sense of integrity and truthfulness if – and I mean if – it turns out they thought having a party the night before Prince Philip’s funeral in strict lockdown was appropriate?

And what happens to any of us called to public office – and this applies to me and all clergy too - to make us think that breaking rules out of sight is ever acceptable, and will not be subject to the strongest discipline?

So the question I am left with is, if these events did take place even partly as they have been reported, how did this decay of trustworthy behaviour happen?

Part of the problem is we take trust for granted all too often.

Trust is at work in everything about us – our families, friendships, workplace, whether we order on-line or purchase in a shop, when we call the electrician, or call the police.

It is there when we drive our car, when get on a bus, when we ask for help from a neighbour, see the doctor, send our children to school, when we follow the news, when we vote.

Trust is an essential component of every dimension of our lives, and we just assume it is there until, of course, something happens to destroy it.

And we know how long it takes to build trust.

Think of how friendship develop, growing in trust over time.

And we know too how quickly trust can be dashed.

“Trust arrives on foot, and flees on horseback.”

Losing trust is devastating, because it is so hard to rebuild, and may indeed be impossible to do so. We see that in friendships, in marriages, where trust has been broken.

I have been thinking a good deal about trust this past couple of years, as we move through the experience of the pandemic, and as we see where trust has risen and fallen across our society.

I have been thinking specifically about it in the life of the Church.

After all, faith, any religious faith, is based on trust – having faith is not the same as knowing something for certain.

Faith is trust, trusting that what you have seen in others and they have told you about faith, what you have read in scripture and other books, and what your own experience suggests, is true, true enough to base your life on.

Thinking about the essential place of trust in my faith has helped me become alert to the essential role of trust in our lives, from the very mundane to the utterly sublime.

And writers on the subject identify factors that are essential for trust to work, on any level.

Two of those factors are what I would call goodwill, and integrity.

We trust those whom we believe are on our side, have goodwill towards us, or we believe are working for our good, or for the greater good.

We trust those who, if you like, will be good for us. Whom we can rely on to be for us, not against us.

Trusting is positive. We might know someone who we rely on to be persistently unkind – it would be a surprise if they weren’t – but we don’t trust them to be that way, because trust is positive.

The second requirement for trust is integrity. We trust those who live and act with integrity.

They do what they say they are going to do, or at least attempt to do it, and behave in ways consistent with the values their role requires of them. Which means not lying.

And it means not putting yourself above the rules everyone else is following. And recognising the cost that people are paying in following those rules.

So I am left wondering, how could seemingly so many people end up behaving in what seems to be untrustworthy ways, it appears without goodwill to those they serve, and without perhaps, integrity?

It may seem to be “just” about parties, but something deeper and more pervasive seems to be going on here.

And it will be vital that the Government works hard and transparently to start the process of rebuilding our trust to be able to serve the good of our nation with integrity – for it to be trusted.