

Since returning from my time away it seems that life in our parish has proceeded at nothing other than full speed! It's been an exciting time, hard work and busy, but many worthwhile events, visits, meetings and worship services happening.

***Recent Services***

With special services for Thanksgiving, All Saints, All Souls, and Remembrance woven into our Sunday observance we have made particular effort to mark these special Sundays and the feedback from them has been overwhelmingly positive. Having said that, we have had some feedback which offered constructive criticism and I am always grateful for those seeking to affirm our intention in offering a diverse liturgically based yet creative worship pattern, whilst being unafraid to lend thoughtful and helpful critique.

I have tasked Rev'd Patrick Sibley to work with David in re-constituting our short-lived 'Liturgy and Worship' group which will have the ongoing role of assessing our whole pattern of worship and liturgy, receiving feedback, and seeking direction for our ongoing worshipping life. There will be a morning to discuss liturgy, and to offer some teaching as to why we do what we do, and what the basis of our liturgical practice is in the time after Epiphany – details will be posted – the morning will take place within the context of a 'teaching Eucharist'.

***Visioning***

We have had two 'Why?' events – both of which have brought about a variety of affirmations and critiques of our current structures and direction, and some consideration of who we are and where we are going as a community. These two sessions will have notes available, and it is important that all members of the PC make themselves aware of these and please attempt to be a part of these discussions. After two 'presentation' based session we are now at the stage of really getting to grips with a sense of shared identity, and I hope to continue these conversations in the New Year – we are just starting to understand the concept of getting to the 'Why' of who we are, whereas we are usually prone to be stuck on the 'how' and 'what' of our activities.

As one parishioner commented – these conversations could change the whole of how we see ourselves and where we are going in a serious way, and the discussion of our identity is just really starting to take shape. Attendance at the first day was very good, the second less so – but both groups were engaged and thoughtful. When I suggested moving on to some next steps there was a strong response that we needed, firstly, to lay some old ghosts to rest and secondly to really grapple with our identity in a serious and detailed way, so a further event will be scheduled after Christmas and New Year.

***Further Follow Up to Why Sessions***

Two issues that came out strongly at our first Why session were that we need to work to do away with a culture of 'Triangulation' (where we talk about people rather than to them) and, at its worst, gossip. I will be thinking in the coming weeks as to how we can address such things – particularly as our visioning process will bring out strong feelings with regards to change, and such times tend to bring out anxieties in the shape of rumour and speculation.

The second issue to follow up on is that in the past there have been instances of Sexual and Emotional abuse that have taken place within and around our community – and at least one member of our community is concerned that this has been carried on in an atmosphere of silence, stating that it is time to ‘break the silence’ – understandably, such emotional concerns are very much at the forefront of many minds at present, bearing in mind just how much historical and current abuse is making news at present. There is in place a clear and robust policy regarding Sexual Misconduct, and a very good ‘Safe Church’ culture, within our wider culture – I will be discussing with Wardens, and with PC if so desired, ways in which this policy can be shared, and how we can address the concerns and negative experiences within our community. Though this may be thought of as ‘all in the past’ the legacy of such abuse is carried today by those who experienced it, and we as a community have a responsibility to engage with and care for one another now with regards to these powerful and painful experiences.

### ***Stewardship***

We are in our ‘pledge’ season – please encourage folk to bring back their pledge cards this coming Sunday in order that we can continue with our budgeting work. I am profoundly grateful to Kate McCabe, our Treasurer, and to all of the Finance Group, for the incredible amount of hard work they are putting in to revision of our recording and reporting processes for finance.

### ***Website***

Our website revision has been delayed, but is still ongoing – we will be investigating how to proceed with this in discussions in the coming weeks.

### ***Changes to Wardenship and PC next year***

We are looking at revising the way in which our Wardens are appointed, to take account of difficulties in recruiting for periods of three years, and to create a dynamic and engaged base of people with experience of Governance in our community, along with drawing on the wisdom of those who hold Warden’s positions for a longer period. At present I am hoping to present at Vestry this year a plan to retain an Appointed Rector’s Warden and an elected People’s Warden – who will serve for up to three years – this remains in line with Canon and satisfies our official responsibilities. I hope alongside this group to have elected up to three other Assistant Wardens – each for a period of a year, renewable twice in consultation with the other wardens and the Rector, and with PC. This would give opportunity to those who might only feel able to offer for a year’s service, and would do away with the expectations of succession between ‘deputy’ and ‘full’ Warden, which is a system that has been more observed in the breach in the past decade or so.

This year will also see some PC members moving on at Vestry, and others coming on to our Governance group – I hope a small group will be able to take on responsibility of discussing PC membership, and encouraging people to stand for election, in the coming weeks.

### ***As always***

It remains a privilege and a responsibility to be your Parish Priest, and I am grateful to be a part of this shared spiritual journey we are all on. Thank you for your time, your dedication, your prayers, and for your attention.

With my prayers and love for you all

Alastair