

A vision for 2022...it's all about Jesus!

I wonder how many of these words and phrases are you familiar with as a member of the Church of England and a member of St Peter's and Blessed Mary?

The Church of England and The Anglican Communion

Holy Scripture - The Book of Common Prayer – The 39 Articles – The Ordinal - and The Canons of the Church of England

Archbishops – Bishops – Archdeacons – Cathedral Deans - Area and Rural Deans – lay and residentiary Canons - Priests and Deacons - Rectors and Vicars – Stipendiary and Non-Stipendiary Clergy – Curates - Readers and LLM's and Pioneer Ministers

Servers - Chalice Assistants – sides persons – readers intercessors – and of course flower arrangers

The Choir – The Band – and Bell Ringers (otherwise known as Campanologists)

The Parish – Benefice – Deanery – Archdeaconry – Diocese – and The Province of Canterbury and The Province of York - The Lambeth Conference – The Archbishops Council – The General Synod – Diocesan Synod – Deanery Synod – and The Deanery Chapter

Wardens – PCC Members – the Standing Committee – and the PCC -
Banns of Marriage – Grade 1 and 2 Listed Buildings – Naves Chancels
and Aisles - The Victorian Society and English Heritage – The Chancellor
of the Diocese and we should never ever forget Faculties

And lastly let's not forget The Electoral Roll – The AGM and APCM which
stands for Annual General Meeting and Annual Parochial Church Meeting
and which are today after the service/at 4pm here in the church!

And very finally...just for information....how can you learn about all these
things if you are not so sure....well all you need is – A copy of The BCP
1662 – The Canons of the Church of England - The Churchyards
Handbook – Practical Church Management a Guide for every parish –
The Handbook for Church Wardens and Parochial Church Councillors
(New Revised Edition) and last but not least The ABC of the PCC (5th
Edition)!

And if you are really in any doubt about anything all you that is left to do is
to ask Paul Emmerson or Di Hunt/Colin Russell who will I am sure know
the answers!

I hope you enjoyed all of those!

Now I don't know about you....but I do love being part of the Church of
England....rooted in history and coming with all the lovely terms of being
part of the Church of England

...we are an historic church but we are also the church of today doing all we can to engage society as it is today

But whether we are looking at the church of the past or the church of the present what are we all about?

What is at the heart of all that comes with being part of the church?

What is most important before the less important and the urgent?

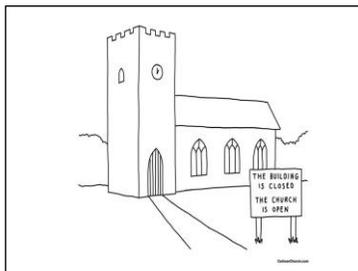
Sometimes it is easy isn't it to just end up being in the church as only the denomination or institution with all its particular ways of doing things.....but what is it all meant to serve?

Over the last couple of years, though the harder times we have all been in, we have doing much soul searching about what is most important in life and faith haven't we.....

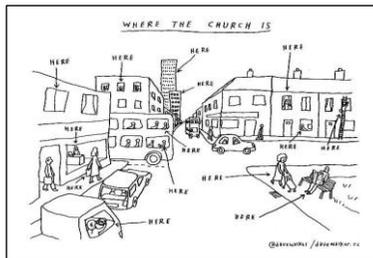
I wish Covid had not happened....but on the other hand I think it is really good that we are now in many ways being more thoughtful and prayerful about who God is calling us to be and what he is calling us to do

(!) I've shown you these before in recent times but they continue to make the point of some of the good things we have learned about what it really means to be church

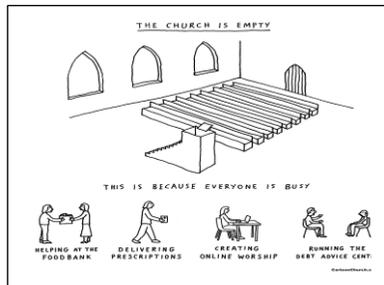
It was hard having our church building closed but perhaps the church 'of us the people' has been more of the church we should be



And where have we been?....we have been more 'out and in touch' with other people much more like Jesus was..he went to people rather than waiting for them to come to him



And what have we all been doing? What are we meant to be doing?'loving and caring and sharing The Christian Good News' whenever we can



Pause

Also we have been learning to be a church that is leaning on God more in prayer and I love for example this breath prayer that I have used a lot which has helped me lean on God...in our difficulties we need to draw strength from God don't we and not ourselves



and we have learned to lean on each other more as we have journeyed together ...being a Christian is a real journey in life following in the way of life of Jesus



Having to live more of a real Christian life is not always an easy thing is it BUT it is good if we might be coming to see and think about things more clearly for the future.....

Pause

So what thinking has been happening?

And what are thoughts are there at the moment for the future of the church.....the whole church and our church here at St Peter's and Blessed Mary

Well let me say, non one person has all the answers yet, but I do think some good direction is emerging and what I would like to do is to share with you some key thoughts that are coming from 2 directions.

1st from our new Bishop and

2nd from our Deanery

By the end of this sermon I am not going to be able to tell you what all the answers are for ourselves....but I hope it will help us think and pray together as we go forwards.....and when we come to our APCM/AGM later we might be able to share observations of where we should give our attention and where we should head

Our Bishop

So first.....what does our new Bishop think about where we are and the future?

At his first and recent presidential address our new Bishop.....Bishop Jonathan Frost..... gave his vision for what he thinks is most important and he spoke in answer to a question that a good friend of his asked before moving to Portsmouth from York,a good friend asked him in a wonderfully direct way: *“So Jonathan, what is the wolf at the door for the Diocese of Portsmouth?”*.

At Diocesan Synod he put forward a number of possible suggestions and I'd like to give you a shortened version of what he said:

Is it the invasion of Ukraine with 2.5 million refugees to add to the millions of other refugees from other countries, the evil of war and killing of people and the threat to world peace?

In some ways yes it could be, because at stake is what matters most in our society for so many – freedom of speech, the rule of law and international co-operation for the crucial things that we need to address together like climate change, poverty and inequality.

Is it Safeguarding with all the historic and current issues in society and in the church....it is certainly a major priority because without a safe church we won't be able to do anything.

Is it resources? because the churches biggest problem is that it just never has enough finance, enough people or enough personal energy.

It is true that there are some big issues to address in the diocese with its current a 10-20% annual deficit....but as Christians we believe in the God who turned five loaves and 2 fish into much more and God will provide all we need.

The wolf at the door...the most important thing....War in Ukraine, Safeguarding or Resources?

Or is it tiredness?....and we are all very tired....we are all in need of some rest...tiredness it can be a barrier to doing all the new things we think we need to be doing and to keep everything else going as well

Or is the wolf at the door...our greatest need.....a lack of planning and organisation?.....Deanery plans that we have been asked to do have not been finalised or agreed and without a plan how can we move forward

Or is the wolf at the door of our church the current generation who just don't know the love of Jesus that has encountered us, saved us, transformed us and is holding us?

The most important thing...our priority.....what we need to address first and foremost.....the Bishop's thoughts of the wolf at the door.....it is not Ukraine, Safeguarding, Resources, Tiredness, Planning or even those who don't know of Jesus yet but the need for our own confident trust in Jesus and of each other...our own spiritual life with God without which we will not have enough for all that he calls us to be and to do

In his address the Bishop highlighted the Latin word 'confidere' which means with faith and with trust

...what we need to do most of all in this time is re-discover a bit more of our confidence in who Jesus is and what he can do through us

...the Bishop's message is that we need to encourage each other to really believe in what we have just celebrated at Easter.....the Jesus who died for us and rose again to offer us new life

In this time Jesus is calling us again to join in with what he is doing.....to bring light and hope to ourselves and to those around us

"I am the light of the world." says Jesus.

"Come to me all you who labour and I will give you rest."

"I have come not that you might have life and have it to the full."

I am the bread of life...he or she who comes to me will never go hungry and never be thirsty."

Our Deanery

The Bishop has I think put his finger on what is of most importance

and then second what about our Deanery of churches?

What thinking has been going in the last year about how we might in the BW area be the church we need to be?

If you can come to the AGM/APCM I can explain these a bit more, but

let me just give you what has been agreed so far

Commitment 1

*Working to encourage each other in our personal Christian faith and so increase our common purpose and commitment,
and using the current parishes as they are
to offer expertise and mentoring between parishes to help each parish grow new leaders, ministries and mission activities.*

Commitment 2

Sharing together ways of growing disciples and enabling lay leadership – for example to develop a Christian and leadership mentoring ethos in every church.

Commitment 3

To carry out an audit of potential in the deanery to develop relationships and to promote the use, sharing and development of resources.

The audit will focus on a range of both outward matters e.g., buildings, finances, structures and, inward matters e.g., faith, discipleship, leadership, ministry styles and mission engagement.

And from the audits, to develop 'Mission Action Plans' of how relationships and resources can be maximized within parishes to help grow parishes and so churches in the area.

Commitment 4

To co-ordinate by regular patterns of meetings, of the key mission/ministry leaders from each parish, to take actions forward - with support and encouragement from the area dean and under the direction of the deanery synod.

Looking ahead into 2022

Our Deanery and Bishop's thinking is I believe in a good direction...a much clearer picture and vision of the way ahead

.....and what do we think about ourselves?

....what should be our specific thinking and vision be looking ahead.

Well we should be seeing things as our new Bishop has put forward ...to focus most on our own life and friendship with Jesus and as we have committed to as part of the Deanery.....to work on our relationship with each other

And then alongside these I think we can and should be positive about where we could be a year or two from now

I can imagine and believe that something of the good life that is beginning to emerge among us after our Covid time can be more

And to end.....I have a few pictures to help you imagine what already is happening but can be more

First even more Vibrant Worship and Services....after such a long time of change we should be encouraged that things are building back and building back better....our 8am traditional BCP services, our 9am choir and organ led service, our 10:30 band service, our evening evensong service, our mid week services and our varied village services at Blessed Mary....there is good life going on and more to come

Second we will and can see more activity in and though **our Connect Groups and our various Small Groups**.....you may not be aware but we currently have 12 Connect Groups with 129 members in them and 34 Small Groups with around 600 going along in one way or another ...the growth potential of our church through our connect and small groups is great and I think that by this time next year they will have grown in depth and number

Third through Kate and Katie's leadership we are seeing much more engagement with families....as just one example...on good Friday....it was lovely to have about 50 parents and 50 children at our Blessed Mary and St Peter's Easter event. By this time next year we do hope to be making much more regular and deeper contact with all the families that we know.

For Our Children we have a range of good groups to which children come....Sunday Club, Butterflies, Teeny Tinies and Messy Church and I am sure that all these will grow as well

For Our Young People.....we have Upham Bandits at Blessed Mary and GWNN at St Peters and a good number coming along...we have about 15 who come along regularly and just 2 weeks ago we took 23 on an end of term trip to a climbing wall...and in the coming year we are starting a youth service and aiming to work even more with other local churches.

Despite Covid it has been good to carry on with some Outreach Eventswe have had our usual community events such as the Upham

fete and BW Country Fayre but also special events to which we can invite others and as we go forwards it would be good to do more

And finally, our vision is to progress at Blessed Mary and St Peter's a number of smaller projects but which will make a big difference to the effectiveness of our welcome into our churches and all we can offer

Blessed Mary

At Blessed Mary we have created a new family area and we hope to receive permission shortly for some new seating in the chancel area and we also hope to improve our welcome area with better displays and information as people come in

St Peter's

At St Peter's we are already underway with our improved Audio Visual System and improved family area to the north aisle but also have plans for improving our coffee area, welcome area as people come in and provision for our choir and band

Conclusion

So come to a close....God's vision for us:

As our Bishop has pointed us to...Growing in own friendship with Jesus
As we have committed in the deanery.....Growing in our friendship with each other

And as we see locally Growing in some practical steps to be as welcoming as we can be in our church buildings

On our own won't be possible to make much progress...but we believe don't we that we are a body in the church.....as we each play our part we will be a body able to do much more the individual parts.

Amen