



st swithun's

bathford

GROW CARE SERVE SHARE

**CHURCH FAMILY NEWS**

**December 2015**

By now most of you will know that I have made the very difficult decision to step down. My final Sunday will be January 10<sup>th</sup> and my final day in the parish 22<sup>nd</sup> January. You have all lodged yourselves deeply in our hearts and so it feels like a huge wrench as Charles and I prepare to move. I now better understand what the early apostles must have felt leaving Ephesus, when Luke writes in Acts 21, 'after we had about *torn* ourselves away'. I am however looking forward to a period where I can reflect and reenergise and will wait and see what emerges beyond that. Charles has not resigned his licence as associate vicar at St Swithun's. He has a period of sabbatical from February to May and will use this to take stock, pray and, together with CPAS and the diocese, seek to discern God's ongoing call for his own ministry.

A few weeks ago, I met with Readers, our warden, administrator and new admin team leader, Liz Townsend, and have also been talking with the Archdeacon. I am hugely encouraged by their commitment and enthusiasm for ensuring the smooth running of the church during the vacancy. All agreed that the load should be spread with no one required to carry too onerous a responsibility, whether in time or tasks, expected of them. Of course for this to happen it means more people need to be willing to shoulder a bit more of the load. I do therefore ask that you do not wait to be asked to help but rather approach any of the Readers, Robert or Liz and offer them your practical support during the vacancy.

The first need is for a church warden to be found as soon as possible. The warden will be responsible for the smooth running of the church and particularly the services during the vacancy. Somebody has kindly come forward to assist them in the role by taking care of the 8:15 AM and 6:30 PM services, together with any immediate issues within the church that requires somebody nearby to pop in and attend to. The role during the vacancy will not, it is hoped, be any more onerous than usual because two reps from the PCC, Michael Craine and Gill Gilbert have been elected to liaise with the diocese and coordinate all matters that pertain to the vacancy. Any warden will also be well supported by the admin team.

I'd like to say a few words about the PCC's work relating to a change in the service pattern but first can I address an issue that a couple of people have understandably raised concerning the timing of my announcement. I had hoped to make the announcement prior to the open meeting; however, for various reasons beyond my control, at that point the formal process of my resignation had not been completed and in fact was only finalised on the Saturday immediately before the Sunday that I made the announcement. It was only then that I had permission from the diocese to announce this decision to the parish and I did so at the earliest possible moment i.e the very next day. I understand completely and regret the disquiet this has caused some of you but I am afraid the timing was out of my control.

Many of you came to the open meeting about the change in service pattern in November. This was the culmination of a long process of work by the PCC over many months, including the away day, which began with them addressing the points made by Michael Craine at the APCM this year. The main focus of the PCC's enquiry was how as a church we can better grow in our own discipleship but also how we can better reach those in our community who come infrequently or not at all and yet are seeking to understand more. The survey was one part of the process and was undertaken to ensure that as many people as possible associated with the church could be consulted. The overwhelming conclusion reached through all this work

was that our current pattern of worship is hindering rather than helping our mission and for this reason needs to be changed.

The PCC took note of the letters that were written with concerns about this change taking place during the vacancy. However they felt strongly that the process, which has been soaked in prayer and felt Spirit-led throughout, had reached the right decision and should not therefore be abruptly halted by my departure. It was acknowledged that change is never easy but the Church of England is having to manage change if it wants to halt decline, let alone grow and we are no exception. The PCC did, however, take on-board various points made particularly relating to timings and recognised that some 'tweaks' may have to be made to the proposed new service times. The PCC also felt it was important to better explain and communicate the changes in more detail, to enable all to understand clearly the reasoning and practicalities. They will therefore be seeking to do this early in the New Year.

The intent is that the changes themselves will be implemented at a date yet to be decided after Easter and before Whitsun and, I believe, will actually make the vacancy easier, rather than more difficult, to manage well. The Archdeacon and Rural Dean are fully informed of these plans, are wholly supportive and will do all they can to ensure the successful implementation of them. On the ground Gill Gilbert and Dennis Pearson will take responsibility for coordinating the first service and the evening service on Sunday and Michael and Heather will coordinate the second service on a Sunday morning which will be more informal in style rather like the present third Sunday service. Again my prayer is that you will feel able to wholeheartedly support the Readers and PCC as they seek to deliver a service pattern and style which the PCC hopes will feel like a natural evolution from our current arrangements and offer the potential to better serve the needs both of our church and wider community and further our mission in the village.

Finally some good news about some really exciting initiatives that are happening. It is great news that 34 young people have signed up to go away for a weekend of Christian teaching and fun in February led by Joy and Michael. Some of these young people are bringing their whole family so a total of 48 are going. Please do pray for all those going on this weekend and of course for Michael and Joy as they organise it. I am sure offers to help with catering would be appreciated nearer the time. In addition, I am delighted that we are able to begin helping with the Genesis soup run in January. We have had nine offers from people in the village, who don't come to church, who want to work with us on this project, which is wonderful news. There are also plans ahead for a monthly midweek service followed by lunch in the New Year and more information will follow about this.

I would not want to gloss over the very real challenges that we, along with so many other churches face in an increasingly secular and yet spiritually hungry world and yet I feel also I am leaving a church which has so many strengths and is such an important part of our local community. My earnest prayer is for the church to remain united in Christ, filled with love for one another - in the same way that Charles and I have received so much love and kindness from you during our time here - and for all to continue pulling together so that God's kingdom will continue to grow and flourish here in Bathford.

May I wish you all peace and joy this Christmas and New Year

With love and prayers

*Jane*