



# TEAMword

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26th May 2024

Trinity

Dear Parishioners and Fellow Team Members and Clergy,

Each year we gather on Trinity Sunday, the most robust of the several 'corporate Communion' we celebrate through the liturgical year. For that occasion this *TEAMword* is published. It comes after the Annual Parochial Church Meeting when new parish leaders are elected; you'll find a list of them in this issue on page 10. The APCM this past year was an occasion for me to share thoughts about the future of the parish and how our three churches might position themselves going forward. The text of that address, more expansive than what I said on the night which was somewhat abbreviated, is the main portion of this *TEAMword*. Please read it prayerfully and open-mindedly.

Its content are my own thoughts and do not result from any formal discussions with either the clergy or lay leaders. But after 18 years of life and ministry in the parish, and taking seriously the Team Rector's special focus on strategy for building up the life of the parish and its congregations, I think it is right to share where my thoughts have 'landed'. My hope, therefore, is that going forward the succession of parish and district church leaders will bear my thoughts in mind as they - you - step into a new stage of your common life in the Body of Christ: 'My report to the parish tonight is a looking ahead on the basis of thoughts, hopes and dreams which are themselves the fruit of 18 years as Team Rector. My role is conceived chiefly as a strategic one but one exercised (as the Profile for the ministry I have occupied since 2006) with 'a light touch'. I hope I've honoured the 'light touch'. I realize, though, that light touches are perhaps most suited to easy, care-free times. I fear such times, were they ever prevalent, are now or soon to be gone. What I share tonight is indeed in the vein of strategy but it may not feel like a light touch. Why is that? The picture on the broad canvas is of a church 'in decline'. I use the phrase 'in decline' in inverted commas since what makes for 'decline' can be assessed in different ways and from different perspectives. Our Diocese of Oxford, which has enormous financial resources at its disposal and comprises some of the wealthiest counties and areas within the Kingdom, is perhaps an exception to the trend yet not in all regards and not absolutely. As is

the case with the effects of climate change, so here: the wealthy can delay and to some extent evade the impact but they cannot in the long run escape it. My aim tonight is not to defend that assessment of decline. I assume that to be true and, given that, I think the following formula will apply to our parochial situation:

- *fewer committed people*
- *will have less and less ordained ministry*
- *while the costs of whatever ministry they have and of the maintenance of buildings and of administrative support will continue to rise.*

In light of that looming and unavoidable scenario I think three areas are important for consideration when clergy and lay leadership within the parish look ahead.

**The Good News not Passing Socio-cultural Trends.** Focus needs to be not on maintenance of the received institutional structures and stock of buildings and appurtenances, but on a clear grasp of what the Good News of Jesus Christ is; focus on that means studious, articulate, creative and pastorally engaged living, teaching and sharing that Good News. No church worth the name has a right to continuance unless that 'pearl of great price', that 'one thing necessary', the Good News of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension and giving of the Spirit is the basis and foundation of the common life of the Body of Christ. Clubby, comfortable fellowships of the like-minded do not fit the bill. Jesus Christ will not bless what is not made in *his* own image.

**Our Material and Fixed Assets.** Recognizing that we have a stock of buildings ancient, fine and complementary, they must be put to more effective and creative use both in service of presenting and nurturing the Good News and as sources of income for congregations and the parish. In particular:

**St Nicolas Church** must think afresh about how it can use its highly visible position in the historic centre of Abingdon and as a gateway to the ancient abbey and its spiritual legacy. It should consider how better to receive visitors to our parish and brain-storm with the rest of the parish how to re-order the building both for regular worship, catechesis and events, and as a spiritual gateway into the rich history and contemporary life of the parish and its congregations events. While the building currently can serve those ends, and is better equipped now with the impressive new facilities to its north, I think that it could serve them far better by means of a wholesale re-ordering plan. The Blacknall bequest and the emerging St Nicolas CIO are potentially significant resources toward that end, and that end should co-opt the commitment of the entire parish both in

dreaming, in deciding, in planning and in execution. Will St Nicolas' leadership wish to partner with the St Nicolas Trust to such an end? When the time is right, yes, I think so.

**St Michael & All Angels** is, amongst other things, our finest acoustical space and is located in a part of Abingdon that differs refreshingly from the town centre. Proximity to the park, alas, impacts access to the church and its programmes *vis-a-vis* parking restrictions. At the same time, its proximity to Abingdon School could provide unexplored opportunities for weekday use and cooperation precisely because of the church's excellence as a venue for musical practice and performance. Might a partnership with the school provide a financial life-line in the face of serious current and future budget challenges? Could a win-win relationship be fashioned that would make the church a six or seven day usable space and a valued asset to an important Abingdon institution while relieving the financial burdens of the congregation by a reliable influx of commercial 'rent'? That is an avenue that ought to be explored.

**St Helen's** is poised to begin fund-raising for its new lighting scheme, one that will transform the interior space and have a significant impact on the church's carbon footprint. It will render the space far more amenable to one of the chief goals of the entire re-ordering process: to celebrate the creative Spirit in the community. The remaining plans for areas less conspicuous to the average Sunday worshipper are important too: a contemplative prayer space in the former choir-chancel area, a re-ordered baptistery where the rite and symbols of Holy Baptism are better related to the eucharistic community and its worship, and a renovated sacristy in preparing for the round of daily services in the ancient 'parish church'. St Helen's is the natural choice for big services for the parish and for big programmes and events for all users. Its new, small events team needs to grow and develop. Might the mid-or long-term aim be an events organizer for all three of our churches?

**The Parish Centre** needs major overhaul as a base for parish-wide events and programmes best located in a non-sacred space AND as a meeting and administrative centre. It is one of the three elements in the strategic plan which the St Helen's DCC embraced about ten years ago yet it awaits full engagement. It's clear to me that the nation's headlong drift from Christian faith and a lack of Christian teaching and moral formation in schools will make the need for serious and thorough teaching of 'faith and manners' more and more necessary for the Church in its Anglican guise to survive and to flourish. The CoE's desideratum that the church be 'at the centre of every community' is a misguided ecclesiology and cannot prevail except by the evacuation of what the Church of Christ really is: a community of faith called out -- that's what *ekklesia* basically means - and set

apart; To be called out from the midst means inevitably to be at the edge. A so-called national or established church, at least as that concept is now understood, in fact if not by intent, rejects what the New Testament teaches us about the Church of Christ.

But the edge is not a bad place to be. But a church - a parish - at the edge will have to be a place where order, rigour, persistence and creativity characterize a thorough-going formation and nurture in the Christian faith as a centre-piece of the parish's agenda is. Catechesis and spiritual formation need to happen in suitable places and the Parish Centre, while not the only place, ought to be fit-for that purpose better than it currently is.

If St Nicolas' Church were to become a place of offerings to the interested and enquiring public, our Parish Centre would have a complementary but different atmosphere, serving as a venue for small groups and expanded pastoral programmes, while St Michael's would offer itself as 'a place apart' with the resources of labyrinth and park.

**Finance.** The time is right to consider re-organizing the financial arrangements of our congregations. Does our received and current arrangement in handling our financial resources meet the maintenance needs and missional opportunities before the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames? Is it sensible that there is no uniquely PCC account to manage shared expenditures? I would say 'no'. Over the past few years our now former Parish Treasurer, Susan Read, worked doggedly to bring the congregational accounting into a shared format. (Thanks to those among you who have assisted in that laborious task.) A chief aim of that complex process was to enable the DCCs and the PCC to analyze trends of expenditure and income and make financial decisions on a strategic basis, that is, looking ahead over five years or so, maybe longer. To some extent that is already possible, yet the result of trends among our three churches is not wholly positive and comfortable.

I think it is time for the PCC to embark on a forthright, no-options-off -the-table discussion with the DCCs about how our significant resources can better serve the corporate interests of the parish. The twenty-first century will see the parish system of the CoE radically reshaped, and that will happen either reactively or proactively. This parish will be best served by *proaction* motivated by this first principle: **we either stand together or we fall separately**. In this context 'standing together' means, in my view, 1. pooling resources, 2. investing resources well, and 3. more direct PCC manage expenditure of resources to maintain and enhance the richness of the church life and witness of our three congregations. The aim is not to put any congregation at risk; just the opposite, it's to

amalgamate in order to strengthen the identity and unique resources and offerings that each congregation can make.

The era of self-standing, single-benefice-with-single-vicar days are gone, so yearning for the flesh-pots of Egypt is not an option and we mustn't allow ourselves to tarry in fantasy! We need to step forward on new terms if we're to hold on to, live out and offer 'the faith once delivered'. Financially speaking all of our congregations have much to gain from pooling resources and by stepping out of the rather passive reliance on the CCLA to multiply our 'talents'. We can in fact do better than that and especially if we were to erect a shared portfolio that could withstand the adverse gales of our uncertain century and, more importantly, enable us to honour our God-given dreams.

All of that 'programme' is possible with the will, with resources and with time. John Henry Newman once said (in well-known words): '*To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often*'. He wasn't advocating one of our age's obsessions, namely, change for change's sake. Rather he meant that living as we do on the high-seas of space and time the attainment of what God has created us to be and requires both letting-go and acquiring anew, and that means change. St Paul talked about 'pressing on', the 'upward call', attaining 'the full stature of Christ' -- such ideas and exhortations being the biblical hinterland of Newman's quotable quote.

What's true of us as individuals is also true of us as 'members incorporate in the mystical Body' of Christ, the Church. That Body, even in its local parochial form, must change; not for change's sake, but by *judicious* change that takes us as a community further toward embodying the fullness of Christ who seeks to fill all things, beginning with his Body the Church (Ephesians 1.23).

Let me now conclude with a change of tack but with the theme of change at the forefront.

Having laid all that on the table, so to speak, I end by announcing the forthcoming change in my own situation. Simply put, it's time to say goodbye. The Bishop of Dorchester has supported my decision to retire this year, and we have agreed that my last service will be on All Saints' Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, a feast of special significance to me in my Christian journey.

Ever since the end of the pandemic lock-down I have felt in myself a lack of 'grip' on my role as Team Rector. You may have noticed that. Part of it has been an awareness that I no longer have the energy required to perform the role as it requires; it is a big job. Finally, I recognize that what the Church of England and

our diocese now want and need from those in priestly service is not what I am equipped or happily disposed to offer.

So, with much – most? – of our parish's habits and expectations back on track after the pandemic, and with a number of exciting prospects for the parish and its congregations to tackle – such as I have outlined tonight, for instance -- I wish to hand all that over to my successor who will bring the skills and energy needed to lead you into the future the Lord is preparing for you.

My clergy colleagues and the lay leaders with whom I've shared this intention have been generous in receiving it. 18 years in a single ministerial post is, after all, a long time!

Diocesan operatives will work closely with St Helen's as it prepares its profile for a new vicar and with the parish as it considers its *desiderata* of the next Team Rector. Area Bishop, Archdeacon, Parish Development Officer, maybe the Area Dean too, will partner with the Team Vicar, the other Team and associated clergy, Lay Ministers and leadership through that process.

My task now is 1. to tidy up what I can of my current ministry both in St Helen's and in the parish; 2. to work with the Team clergy and ministers to prepare for the Team Rector's absence; and 3. to turn to the many personal and practical matters that attend both entry into retirement and the vacating of a rectory which will have been a happy home for over 18 1/5 years.

If any consolation is needed, I suggest it is this: you have a fine corps of Team clergy and ministers, of honorary assistants, and of wardens and lay leaders to carry St Helen's and the parish's other congregations through an interregnum flying our parochial flag vigorously and Christianly.

So God bless you all, and be assured of my sincere prayers for good momentum and a fine outcome as you gradually step into that new opportunity.'

The Revd Charles Miller, Rector

## **5.30 PM SERVICE FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS AT ST HELEN'S**

**Readings:** Mark 1.1-13

**Hymns:**

392 Bright the vision that delighted, once the sight of Judah's seer.

604 Through all the changing scenes of life

18 O strength and stay

### **Parish Baptism Pathway**

Taking over from Susan Scott as Baptism Coordinator (in the case of parents enquiring about baptism for children) has been a learning curve, and a privilege, for me. It's sometimes been a headache, but more often it has brought delight.

Baptisms were, of course, suspended at the start of lockdown, and only resumed in late 2021. We didn't get back to offering our full pathway for another year. But since January 2023 we have been able to offer parents reasonably thorough preparation sessions (or a double session if it happens on a Saturday). Pre-Covid, parents would then bring their child to Thanksgiving at the now-defunct Morning Praise service; since Covid, they come to one of the churches to a main service which will contain a Thanksgiving. Following the baptism (usually on a Sunday afternoon), they will come again for the congregation to welcome the newly-baptised church member, and to receive the baptism candle.

I usually explain this pathway to parents by drawing attention to the part of the preparation course which explains that baptism is both a point and a line. It's a one-off, dated event; but it's also something that we are called to live out every day. By working through the stages of the pathway, parents enact and hopefully make real the insight that the baptism will happen on a given date, but is part of a lifetime's journey, for them and us and the children.

People vary as to how close they feel to the CofE and how close they want to stay. Engaging with parents is a two-way process: we (clergy and lay helpers) try to share what we understand of the faith into which the new person is being baptised; and we receive back from the people we meet insights into being human. I am constantly humbled by realising how much people love their children.

Thanks to Charles for devising the pathway and the course; to Charles and Fr Paul for being so generously on hand to sort out queries theological, pastoral and

practical; to assistant and honorary clergy for also turning out on Sunday afternoons; to Susan Worthington and occasionally David Bevington for support in delivering the preparation; to Jackie for all she does on the admin side.

Gwen Bevington

## Notices

**Silent Reflections** will be held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30 pm at St Michael and All Angels beginning in the church room. There will be the opportunity to walk the labyrinth. Final prayers will be at 8.30 pm and refreshments will be available. Parking permits are available in the church room for use in Park Road.

**Corpus Christi (Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion).** There will be a Sung Mass at St Michael's Church at 7 pm on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May at which Fr Paul will preside and preach at. There will be refreshments afterwards. There will not be a Said Mass at 12.30 pm that Thursday.

**Exploring Prayer and Ways of Praying: Silence, Music and Icons.** Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June, 10.30 am – 4 pm. Open Study Day with Joanna Tulloch, The Revd Dr Liz Carmichael, Sr Clare-Louise SLG, Delvyn Case III. All welcome. Free for students; non-students £5. Tea and coffee provided. You are welcome to bring a sandwich lunch.

**Moving into Stillness:** Circle dancing to Taizé music with silent interludes at St Michael and All Angels on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June in the church from 9.45 – 10.45 am before the regular circle dancing session at 11 am (now on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month only). No prior experience/partner needed. Tea and coffee will be provided.

**Quiet Garden Day at Aston Tirrold Centre for Reflection** Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 10.00am-4.30pm. Leader: Philip Mader-Grayson. Theme: *The Joy of Lament: exploring thoughts from Esther de Waal's book 'The White Stone'*. Refreshments are provided, but please bring a packed lunch. A donation of £10 would be welcome. To attend, it would be helpful to email: [atquietgardendays@gmail.com](mailto:atquietgardendays@gmail.com) in advance. All are welcome.

**Wanted:** Local children and young people to sing three songs in a massed choir in The Abingdon Passion Play.



**The School of St Helen and St Katharine** has very kindly organised for any children who would like to learn three songs for The Abingdon Passion Play (two performances on Saturday June 22nd midday and/or 5pm) to come along for registration **from 4.20pm to 4.45pm** to the Yolande Paterson Hall at the School of St Helen and St Katharine, Abingdon, OX14 1BE, **on Thursday June 13<sup>th</sup>**. The event will finish by 6pm that day. Participants will work with Sally Mears (Musical Director of The Abingdon Passion Play 24 and Singing Teacher at the School of St Helen and St Katharine). Please send names of young people interested to Sally (smears@gmail.com) in advance of this free workshop. Thank you.

**CiA Church Twinning visit for Abingdon's Passion Play.** 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

People are coming from Belgium, and maybe France/Germany, to attend the Passion Play. They stay with host families to help forge personal friendships and live in our culture. We need people to offer to host them. There is a full programme including time spent with you. For details contact: Eileen at epkbontempelli@gmail.com, or 01235 526331.

**The next meeting of the Agnostics Anonymous** open discussion group will take place on Tuesday 25th June from 6 - 7.30 pm in the Abingdon Parish Centre, opposite the entrance to St Helen's Church, West St Helen Street. John Barton will give the introductory talk on ""How We Got the New Testament". Keith Ward and John Kerr will answer questions and join the discussion. FREE and EVERYONE WELCOME. For more information contact Jill Gant (01235 528929).

**Date for your diary:** On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> July, at 7 pm Academy Brass and Wantage Youth Brass Bands are returning to St Michael & All Angels' Church, Park Road, Abingdon OX14 1DS. Proceeds from the concert are to be shared with The Abingdon Bridge, TARIRO – Hope for Youth in Zimbabwe, and St Michael's Church. Tickets can be purchased in advance from <https://www.trybooking.com/uk/DKYX> Adults £12, concessions £10 (plus 15p booking fee per ticket), age 16 & under free. Tickets will also be available on the door by cash/credit card payments. Refreshments available and free parking. A concert not to be missed!

**Advance Notice.** We will be marking Charles' retirement with a Parish lunch at the Hilton Hotel on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September. Details re: booking etc. to be given in early July.

## **OUR PARISH LEADERSHIP 2024 - 25**

### **Our new Wardens are:**

St Helen's: Margaret Horton, David Pope

St Michael and All Angels: Louise Heffernan, Joyce Kelly

St Nicolas: Eluned Hallas, Paul Rast-Lindsell

**Treasurers:** Susan Read (St Helen's) and Jenny Metcalfe (St Nicolas')

### **Deanery Synod Representatives:**

Miss A Green

Dr H Glennie

Ms S Scott (also Deanery Lay Chair)

Miss A Scott (also a Diocesan Synod Representative)

Mrs E Hallas

The Revd R Rutherford, Clergy Representative

### **Elected PCC Representatives:**

Mrs K Burland (St Helen's)

Mrs M Anderson (St Helen's)

Mrs H Clare (St Michael's)

Mr J Clare (St Michael's)

Dr G Lewis (St Nicolas)

Mrs J Fishpool (St Nicolas)

Dr J Metcalfe (St Nicolas)

### **Safeguarding Team:**

Mrs Pat Hudson (St Helen's) – Parish Safeguarding Officer (tbc)

Mr David Pope (St Helen's) – Dashboard Manager

Mrs Catherine Kimber (St Helen's) – Verifier

Mr Emmanuel Chukwuma – Safeguarding Officer – St Helen's

Fr Paul Smith – Pro tem Safeguarding Officer – St Michael's

Mrs Jenny Fishpool – Safeguarding Officer – St Nicolas'