

## Sean's newsletter message – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020

This week marks exactly a year since the family and I moved to Ross-on-Wye. It has certainly been a busy year full of unexpected events: a Royal visit in November; becoming Acting Rural Dean in January; floods in February; the pandemic from March... and now as official guidance moves us rather clumsily towards normal human interaction, I am enjoying my first proper leave since arriving here. The last 4 months have been particularly challenging – it hasn't been business as usual for the church, and I am indebted to those (and they are many) who are helping us adapt to our changing circumstances, including live-streamed Sunday services; new and creative ways of connecting with and caring for people; and resources for growing faith at home. Our three parishes, by God's grace and your hard and innovative work, have weathered the storm, and new leaders and abilities have been recognised.

As it has been a time of crisis, some of our planned work has needed to be postponed, and priorities have needed to reflect areas of greatest need. I do hope that we'll all be able to return to a more stable, more normal, and less crisis-driven mode of being church before long.

The pandemic has been deeply traumatic and disorientating for all of us. Everything we assumed was secure and predictable has been shaken, and it is impossible to plan more than a month or two in advance due to uncertainty. We have lost our everyday "compass bearings" but our churches have not. Our true North will always be Jesus Christ, and a reading of the gospels will always have the power to ground us in who we really are in God's sight, and how we should live. But in addition to this, earlier in the year a vision day was convened to prayerfully discern how we could follow Jesus Christ "here and now". What emerged was a vision of being an inclusive, intergenerational church inspiring faith, hope and love in our communities. At recent PCC meetings of all three parishes in the benefice, this vision statement was unanimously adopted as our common vision. To put this differently, all three PCCs felt that this vision expressed our calling as individual parishes, but also as a benefice family. So, in a terribly traumatic and disorientating time, our parishes believe that they have heard God's call, and have come together under a common compass bearing.

This spiritual heading, this mission, is clear: empowered by the Spirit of God we should do all we can to be inclusive and intergenerational in our praying, thinking and practices; and whoever we are and wherever we are, we are to work with the Spirit to inspire faith, hope and love in that situation by doing small things with great love.

You will see changes to our church logo that reflect the adoption of this vision – and I will continue discussing these changes and our strategy for embedding this vision in the way our parishes operate in our newsletter next week.

Until then, every blessing in Christ Jesus.

Sean - Rector

## Sean's newsletter message – 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020

Almost everyone I have spoken to this week has expressed their dismay and frustration and fear about how life is right now – and I think these are completely appropriate feelings. It is so easy to enter a downward spiral as we struggle with masks and social distancing, or contemplate another spike in the pandemic, or the economic cost of COVID that will be with us for generations.

But today let us consider an upward spiral that starts with our churches. The bottom of that spiral was arguably the moment when we were asked to lock our doors and stop public worship in our buildings. But from that moment, inspired by the creative Spirit of God and the love and commitment of people to God's Church, the spiral has begun to bend upwards: pre-recorded Sunday services from the Rectory garden and from within our homes; pastoral care by phone; post service coffee, PCC meetings, Come Dine with Me, Toast and Family services all by Zoom; and many other innovative and caring ways in which our churches have adapted to this crisis, and have continued to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to our communities.

Last week I wrote that during this disorientating time our churches have had a strong sense of direction thanks to a visioning process held earlier in the year. We know the direction we need to head in; we know who God is calling us to be and what he is calling us to do; and now it is time to starting making progress in being **inclusive, intergeneration churches that inspire faith, hope and love in our communities**. This is the spiritual compass bearing that gives direction to our upward spiral.

Today I would like to write briefly about our identity, about who we are. Our travel passports provide a certain notion of who we are, but at a deeper, existential, and theological level we identify as sons and daughters of God; as those who recognise that we created in God's image, and are known and loved and forgiven by God; and that we are also called by him to continue the work of Christ here and now. We are Christians, but we are also those who chose to identify as Anglican Christians – a family of believers numbering around 80 million around the globe. While "Christian" is always the term we should primarily identify with, our Anglican tradition, our way of worshipping and thinking of God, our understanding of our role in our community, is distinct from that of other Christian groups, each of which have their own identity and traditions and ways of doing things.

And then we are the Anglican Christians of Ross, Walford and Brampton Abbots who by ecclesiological adjustment have been brought together legally, administratively and pastorally into what is called a benefice.

All this reflects who we are, and our vision gives a focus for what we are called to do. It thus makes sense for our "public face" to reflect both our identity and our mission. Our three PCCs have

recently adopted the logo you can see on the newsletter this week. One of the first things that you might notice is that we have moved from calling ourselves “The Benefice of Ross and Walford with Brampton Abbots” to “The Ross Parishes”. There are a number of very good reasons for this – but from the start it is important to know that this is simply a change of our public name – our branding if you like - rather than any legal change of name. The word “benefice” has little if any resonance with the general public, while the word “parish” does mean something. We have also in recent years used the acronym Rawchurch to reflect **Ross And Walford** churches - but what about Brampton Abbots? And what if there was need, through a pastoral reorganisation of the Deanery, for another parish to join this benefice? The Rawchurch acronym is not inclusive of our parishes now, and wouldn't be then. I am not sure that Rawchurch means anything to the public – but “The Ross Parishes” expresses who we are succinctly and clearly.

The logo expresses not just our name but also our vision and mission – our direction of upward travel. The logo incorporates a star to reflect parishes guided by God who bring the light of Christ to others.

I hope that the new life that you see bubbling up through these parishes will encourage and inspire you. God is greater than this pandemic or any other challenge we face, and he at work in and through The Ross Parishes.

Yours in Christ

Sean - Rector