

A few words from the Vicar

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5-6)



The number of stipendiary (i.e. full time, paid) clergy available for allocation to parishes is falling and is projected to continue falling for the foreseeable future. It's a fact that those stipendiary priests who retire are not being replaced in sufficient numbers by those who are newly ordained. The bottom line is there are not enough vicars for each parish to have their own. The days of one vicar, one parish are rapidly passing into history to become a fond but distant memory.

The Church of England has been aware of this situation for some years and initiatives are in place to encourage vocations to stipendiary and other ministries. Manchester Diocese, for example, has a vocations initiative called 'Sowing, Growing, Harvesting' and, under this initiative, I am the Radcliffe & Prestwich Deanery Vocations Champion and Debra Johnstone is our Parish Vocations Champion.

But the fact remains, unless the number of men and women coming forward for ordination significantly increases over the next few years, forward planning suggests that by 2025 the four parishes of the Ainsworth & Radcliffe cluster (to which we belong) can look forward to sharing two stipendiary clergy between them. This situation represents a significant challenge for this church and for our Radcliffe neighbours: St Andrew's, St Thomas & St John's and St Mary's.

Indeed, this challenge is one of the factors that, last year, led the PCC to develop a Mission Action Plan for this parish. We are a thriving, growing church and through implementation of the Mission Action Plan we are seeking to continue to grow this church, whatever the future might hold for us.

Well, for us and the Radcliffe churches, 2025 has come 11 years early! With the clergy vacancies at St Andrew's and St Thomas & John's we are now in a situation where, at the very least, in the none too distant future you can expect to be sharing my time with one or more of our Radcliffe neighbours.

In common with most stipendiary clergy, I already work long hours. I'm not saying this to gain your sympathy and I'm not complaining; long hours are part and parcel of what it means to be a vicar and when I became a stipendiary priest I did so with my eyes wide open! But this does mean there is no spare time available that would allow me to absorb the additional workload that's coming my way without it affecting the way I exercise my ministry within this parish.

So, as I become more involved in ministry elsewhere within the Ainsworth and Radcliffe cluster, how I operate within this parish **will** change. Furthermore, if you don't wish to be

disappointed, your expectations of what I can reasonably do within this parish **will** need to change accordingly.

Also, from now on all of us can expect to work much more closely with our Radcliffe neighbours. Indeed, it is likely that this parish will become part of a team with possibly one or indeed all three of the Radcliffe parishes. The logic of the situation we face is that obvious!

Nonetheless, for now we look through a glass darkly, none of us really knows what the future holds. Discussions are at a very early stage and, whilst it is possible to sense God's hand in all of this, none of us knows what the outcome will be or how things will change for us and our neighbours. But change they will!

Yet, the Gospel imperative remains: to be effective in mission and evangelism, to be God's love in the world, to grow the Church. Therefore, whatever happens, we must not take our eye off the ball; we must remain focused upon Jesus!

Watch this space!

Every Blessing

Dave