

A few words from the Vicar

'For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.' (1 Corinthians 3:9)

There has been some more progress regarding our forming a team with St Andrew's, St Thomas & St John's (which includes St Phillip's) and St Mary's. At its last meeting the four parish steering group began to tease out some of the challenges we need to address.

There are no show-stoppers, thankfully, but there doubtless be some challenges heading our way.

Which vicarage the Team Rector lives in isn't considered important in the overall scheme of things and the name we give to the team is not particularly important for now – although I don't think calling us the 'Radcliffe & Ainsworth Team' (RAT for short) would not be a good idea; the 'Ainsworth & Radcliffe Team' (ART) sounds much better! Hopefully we'll come up with a snazzy new name for the team but that's a decision for later.

One of the more important challenges we face is to tease out how we will operate as a team with less stipendiary (i.e. full time, paid) clergy. For the fact is, going forward, there will be three of us (a Team Rector plus two Team Vicars) rather than the four stipendiaries that our cluster of parishes enjoyed until very recently.

This isn't a simple task of allocating pastoral responsibility for individual churches to clergy and working out a rota for presiding at Holy Communion – bish, bash, bosh, job's a good 'un! I wish it was that simple but it isn't, not least because clergy don't just work on Sundays.

Of course, pastoral responsibility for individual churches will be allocated at some point and we will need to draw up a rota to ensure everyone gets a fair crack of the whip when it comes to celebrating Holy Communion. However, if that's all we needed to do then we would be setting our stall out to be nothing more than a grouping of separate parishes, carrying on as before but which just so happen to share clergy.

The fact that we are setting up a **team** ministry and being part of a **team** implies something different. Whilst teams are made up of individuals with differing characteristics, it is those individuals coming together to work together collaboratively that creates the team. And so it is with churches.

Another fact of team life is that, once the team is legally established, all three stipendiaries will be licensed to the team rather than the individual parishes within it. So, in addition to exercising oversight of specific churches, each stipendiary will carry cross team responsibilities. There is therefore a lot of work to be done of the next few months to identify and allocate those responsibilities amongst the clergy team in such a way that allows us to play to our strengths. For example, who will lead on schools work within the team? Who will lead on mission and evangelism? Who will lead on pastoral care? Who will lead on social action? Plus much, much more!

And that's just for starters!



Something else to bear in mind is that three stipendiaries can't possibly do the same amount of work as four. So not only will we need admin support, we will also need to work differently. And by 'we' I don't just mean the clergy.

Current thinking is that stipendiary clergy will need to become more episcopal in the way we exercise our ministries. That is not to say that we will suddenly start wearing purple shirts and pointy hats but rather we will become less hands on and more like company directors. Working collaboratively (within the clergy team and between clergy and laity) will be essential if we want to see all five churches thrive and grow, and some of the things the stipendiary clergy do now will need to be done by others.

And this brings me to vocations.

The reason we are rapidly heading towards becoming part of a team, the reason the model of one vicar one parish (as seen in 'Grantchester' – brilliant series by the way) is fast disappearing is that not enough men and women are coming forward with a calling to become stipendiary priests. So, we need to pray that God will call more to come forward.

But there is also need (including locally within our new team) for women and men to answer God's call to become Readers and self-supporting priests such as Ordained Local Ministers. As many of you will know, Debra Johnstone is exploring a possible calling to become an OLM. Let us pray for Debra as her calling is tested over the months to come but also let us pray that others might come forward from within our congregation to answer God's call. And if you feel that God is calling **you** to be one of those others, sooner or later you will need to pluck up courage and arrange to have a chat with me. I look forward to receiving your call.

And I nearly forgot, Christmas is nearly upon us. There is a lot going on at Christ Church in December. So, come along, join us. You are always assured of a very warm welcome at any of our services.

Anyway, Merry Christmas.

Every Blessing

Dave