

## A few words from the Vicar ....

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. (Psalm 46:1-3)*

One of the things I like about the Church of England is that we somehow give the impression of unchanging timelessness. Yet the reality is that the Church of England, like all thriving organisations, does change, albeit mostly at a gentle and gradual pace, which is the Anglican way.

So, for example, we have as our inheritance the unchanging, timeless beauty of the Book of Common Prayer. Indeed, in many ways, I'm quite traditional in my tastes when it comes to worship and for me there is nothing better than finishing a busy Sunday with Evensong. It is a truly beautiful service.

For me Evensong is the ecclesiastical equivalent of a nice cup of tea and I would strongly urge you to come and experience it with me one Sunday evening.

Despite this timeless, unchanging feel, if you look carefully, you will see that the Church of England has changed in so many ways in recent years.

Sometimes change is the logical response to theological developments. For example, we now have women priests and before long, I hope, women bishops too. Also, it is only in recent years that parish priests have been allowed the discretion to marry divorcees. I welcome these are changes but I appreciate not everyone will agree with me.

A less welcome trend from my point of view is that, as the number of stipendiary clergy reduces rapidly over the next decade many more parishes will find themselves sharing clergy. Sadly, the days of "one vicar, one parish" are fast disappearing to be replaced by the "Parson's Dash" as frazzled clergy rush from one congregation to another on Sunday mornings.

As a mission-minded priest with a heart for church growth, this is a worrying development. Worrying because a colleague who recently researched church growth found that (surprise, surprise) churches are more likely to thrive and grow with their own dedicated leader in place.

Still, whatever the challenges ahead, experience teaches me that wishful thinking changes nothing. As a pragmatist, I find that the best response is to "keep calm and carry on".

In a church context, this means remaining constant in our faithfulness to the Gospel. Whatever our circumstances and the challenges we face, we must continue to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers to all who would follow him. And we must do our best to live our lives as faithful followers of Christ.



One major change we will need to get used to is the fact that Chris Haworth, after eleven years of faithful service, is stepping down from the post of churchwarden. It goes without saying – but I'll say it anyway – that this church owes a great debt of gratitude to Chris for his hard work and diligence over the years.

I'm sure we'll all thank Chris in our own ways, but permit me to express my heartfelt thanks to him, particularly for the advice and support he gave me as I got to know this parish and its people.

Every Blessing

*Dave*