

October 2019

## Pastoral Letter from the Priest in Charge, Greenways Benefice, to all members of the Benefice worshipping communities

Dear All,

Over the last 5 years, through prayer & with a sense of God's leading, I have offered us the 3 words *Praying, Loving, Growing*. During this time, others too have prayed into & developed these words with me which we now have as our Benefice Vision Statement.

### ***Loving as Jesus loves, Praying as He prays, and Growing in Christ to make Him known***

This is exciting. But is also just visionary. It needs unpacking into the "*whats*" & "*hows*"; unpacking into the real activities of our worshipping community that are the outworking of our shared vision. This process is underway in each congregation. If you are not involved directly & want to be, please ask! As always, everyone is included, until or unless anyone decides not to be.

Since June this year, Tom & I have also engaged many of you in conversations over **how we work together as a Benefice**. We are 3 beautiful congregations, diverse in demographics, but we share 1 ministry. We are also 1 Benefice, with 3 worship centres. We have 1 Priest in Charge, and 1 Licensed Ministry Team. Of course, we have wider & more local leadership teams & councils, & that is beautiful as I lead you in shared & inclusive leadership ways. But since the agreement in 2014 to seek a Priest in Charge that would encourage & equip us as 1 Benefice; I have been leading you as such. And we have all been learning more about what this really means & really looks like. These current conversations engage with this arena, focusing on issues of worship service content, & more recently of the timings thereof. They consider how we operate together, complement each other, utilise who we are and what we have been given most effectively, & importantly how we reach out to others.

We began this process asking the question. "When a service in (*name of church*) really works, what is it that does so?" Essentially asking & looking at, what works? Why? & therefore, how can we further that and ensure it occurs more often?

If you have not picked up on this through my recent Clergy updates, & in reading this, it is the 1<sup>st</sup> time you have heard of this initiative, then please speak a member of any of the ministry or leadership groups (licensed, lay, councils, wardens etc). Part of the role of any member of these groups is to reflect the thoughts of the people (all of us), as well as to share with you matters of the discussions had within the leadership groups themselves. All have been encouraged to do this.

It is a two-way process 😊

### **So why the thought of a fresh approach to Benefice worship on a Sunday morning?**

Well as I lead you, I am reminded of my responsibilities to both our worshipping communities & to the wider communities in which we live & serve. It has also long been a difficulty of mine that I am not able to worship & be present (whether leading, preaching or just "being") regularly with any of the 3 congregations. I mean, bi-weekly or monthly attendance is no platform upon which to lead you effectively. I (or any other member of the leadership team), is less able to connect with you, or the issues (successes or challenges) relating to any of the 3 worship centres on this basis. I, for example, often feel I am playing catch up, and quite often become aware of things way after the event.

As conversations continue, & as your councils are invited to engage more fully with these matters, I have outlined overleaf for you all, the reasons & aims of why we are having these discussions, conversations & investigations at all. And I encourage you all to consider these prayerfully, & if you wish, to get involved.

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- To help facilitate & encourage spiritual & numerical growth across the benefice.
  - The depth of spiritual journeys that each one of us are on as well as an encouragement of disciples who make disciples Mon-Sat as well as Sundays.
- To increase the opportunities of our REACH & Influence to the community around us.
  - Currently someone must be free at 10/10.30 on Sunday morning to attend any of our morning services. What if 3 church congregations met at different times? We would certainly become more accessible to those around us!
- Maximise the use of the gifts & skills God has already given us.
  - Our licensed leadership team is less available than times past & often overstretched (e.g. currently we have 3 people preparing 3 sermons each week, alongside often having an additional service leader; & all for essentially the same time each week).
- To produce a schedule of services that can be more easily be overseen in a benefice of 3 churches with only 1 vicar & 1 ministry team.
  - Having a pattern where 1 minister (clergy or lay) *could* (if they wished or if required), minister at 2 or even 3 churches on any given Sunday. And if they weren't leading/preaching, could attend & engage more fully with our worshipping communities. As PIC I would certainly benefit from this possibility. And in my leadership, you would too.
- Reminder & increase of the encouragement for all to be intentionally rooted within a small, house or fellowship group, between Sunday or weekly corporate worship opportunities.
- Relationship, Connectivity & Pastoral Support.
  - Currently, any member of the ministry team (or congregation member), can only attend 1 service in 1 place each week.
    - E.g. I would choose to attend more than 1 each week. Regardless of whether one is leading or preaching, more regular attendance & presence (facilitated by different service times) would mean I can connect with each of you more effectively & more regularly. It would enhance our understanding & knowledge of each other's needs. It would increase effective communication & togetherness in ministry & worship & our support in pastoral needs.

I could elaborate hugely on each of these reasons & aims. But invite you to talk with each other. Come & have a coffee with me if you would like to chat.

Nothing is decided yet. That is why discussions have been going on for some time, & why they continue.

My hope is that we can agree something this autumn that we might all be willing to try for 2020.

Doing new things can feel challenging for all, I get that. It can feel unsettling. I am not aware of many who relish change in any area of life. For freshness to be successful though, we all need to join in. We must show courage, humility & grace to each other. Differing opinions are OK. There are no perfect answers. And not everyone may be content with any changes suggested. But plenty are not currently content either.

Your church councils are engaging with information, opinions & reflections gathered over the last few months in their autumn meetings. Maybe you would like to offer yourself to play a part somehow? Or at least to find a way for your thoughts to be conveyed to a council member, & so be included.

In Christ  
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