

Rector's letter December 2021

In one of the now classic Christmas songs we hear these words of John Lennon:

So this is Christmas
And what have you done
Another year over
And a new one just begun
And so this is Christmas
I hope you have fun
The near and the dear ones
The old and the young

A very Merry Christmas
And a Happy New Year
Let's hope it's a good one
Without any fear

By the time you read this, it will only be early December, and I want to echo John Lennon's words by wishing you all a very merry Christmas (this is, after all, the December edition of Focus!) and I would ask you to pray that it will be a 'good one' and definitely better than last year!!!!

All of which leads me to say that details of our Christmas services appear elsewhere in the magazine, and to invite you to join us – we would love to celebrate this most special of seasons with you.

Now as we begin to turn our thoughts to 2022, one of the things we will be looking forward to is discerning the identity of the person God is calling to be our **new team vicar** to replace Andy Patrick. And the good news is that it has been agreed with our Bishop, Helen-Ann, that the post will continue to be a full-time one, even though a part-time appointment might be more realistic in terms of what we and the diocese can afford in the more difficult financial times that we find ourselves in.

This is, of course, a **great vote of confidence** in us as a parish, (and feels like an early Christmas present!!!), but what the PCC were keen to do was not just make the appointment without giving serious thought to whether it should be a like for like replacement or whether things should be tweaked – and what was agreed was that the shape of ordained ministry in the parish should take something of a new direction, with 50% of the time of the new team vicar being devoted to seeking to establish a new worshipping community (or even communities) in the North of the parish, such as in the New Park area, or even possibly beyond. In other words, there would be a strong missional element to the role – and importantly it was on this basis that the bishop agreed to seek to make the appointment.

I want us to be very clear at this stage that this does not mean a 50% cut in the provision of ministry to St Luke's – but rather that as a parish, as **St John's and St Luke's together**, we are taking the brave step of committing a lot of our resources to outreach – and not just clergy resources either, because such mission work is inevitably, inherently and essentially a team effort. Now **the scary but exciting thing** is that we don't know exactly what the outcome of this step will be – but the great news is that God does! I for one am absolutely delighted about this development, and I know the PCC are too.

However, there is a big challenge to us in this because as things stand as a parish, we are **not able to afford** making our full share payments to the diocese based on us having both a team rector and a team vicar (the full share for 2022 is £142,000 while we are budgeting on paying £120,000). The bishop is willing to see a temporary shortfall but only on the basis that we work our socks off in the next few years to substantially increase our income. Therefore we need to be praying and thinking how we do this – and make no mistake, it will not be easy and will involve sacrifice – but the bottom line is that because we believe knowing Jesus is the best gift anyone can receive, supporting mission in this way should be our gift to our parish and our town.

Thus, in the New Year we will be asking people to prayerfully look once again at how much they can give to the mission and the ministry of the parish. In addition, we will be urgently seeking to identify a small group

of people to make grant applications on behalf of the PCC (volunteers welcome) so we can continue to fund our Young People's Worker post beyond March 2023 when the current funding runs out.

For all these reasons, the **church prayer meeting on 11th January** will focus on praying for the new team vicar and on our financial situation. Please come along if you possibly can – 7.30pm at St John's

As I close, I want to say that humanly speaking, it looks a tall order for us to fund the level of ministry we want to see, but we need to remember the words of the angel to Mary, *'For nothing is impossible with God'*

Blessings

Simon