

### ***From the Vicar...***

It hardly seems six years since I wrote my first parish magazine article, when I introduced myself and my wife Lorraine to you all. Reading it again just now, I remember the excitement of looking forward to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ together and getting to know one another, with the hope of moving the parish forward.

This letter unfortunately, will be my last as your vicar; not because I am moving on to another parish, or I need a change or a different challenge, but because age has caught up with me and I am retiring!

As you may be aware, St Peter's was my first parish as an incumbent ...and it will be my last! This vocation to ordained ministry as your vicar has been the most fulfilling of my priestly and Christian life and a privilege that not many people experience. Thank you for accompanying me on this journey, for your fellowship, friendship and support, especially from the Wardens, PCC and lay leaders of all the organisations.

I must also mention the school in particular because taking the Christian message to the staff and children and having them feel at home in their church has been a blessing and such a rewarding experience for me. As a governor and as the parish priest, we have worked together through many wonderful times and been supportive of each other through some difficult times as well. I just want to express my sincere thanks to Rachel Brown, our Deputy Head who has welcomed me into the school with open arms and also to congratulate her on being recently appointed as our new Headteacher!

The parish now enters a vacancy (known previously as an interregnum) and the process of appointing another incumbent. Unfortunately, due to many factors, including a lack of priests and that this parish would struggle to maintain a full-time vicar (I have always been part time) means it may be some time before a new appointment is made. Thankfully, our local friends at St Laurence's and other clergy will provide you with cover in the meantime. I would like to publicly express my heartfelt thanks to our retired clergy, Fr John Cree and Fr Alan Clements, for all their help and support in covering services for me while on holiday or sick.

Having said all this and realising that many of you will miss having your own vicar again for quite a while, remember a church is not all about the vicar! The church is its people, but its purpose is to worship God together and give him the praise and honour due to him, through his Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, our congregation numbers have fallen like every other church. It is up to you to bring our parish alive again, to create new things, restart and rejuvenate our worship and to support our uniformed and other organisations; to encourage our young people back into church and into the fold of Christ's love.

In effect, you have a clean sheet to work from, but at the same time a foundation to build upon. We have a building and an organ that are envied by others, but like your own houses, it needs upkeep. Don't leave it to someone else.

There are tasks that need to be done, please don't wait to be asked or expect they will get done...offer your gifts when and where you can. In 2020, despite the lockdown and the severe strain on people's finances, you responded sacrificially and generously (and many of you switched to standing order to keep a regular income coming in) which meant that we paid our Parish Share in full.

St Peter's has always been for me my spiritual family. And like all families we have our ups and downs, the times when we didn't always see eye to eye. But like a family, we have a bond of love for one another through the words of our Lord and a saviour Jesus Christ, who gave one of the two greatest commandments: "Love your neighbour as yourself" and the instruction that we must "love one another as I have loved you."

I feel I ought to close with some memorable words of wisdom, but parting as they say is such sweet sorrow, sweet because I get to have more rest time, but sorrow to leave all of you, parishioners and colleagues of course, but also as Jesus said, "I now call you my friends."

It just remains for me to say on behalf of myself and Lorraine, thank you for the last six years. We're not going far, so I'm sure our paths will cross in the not-too-distant future. We will miss you, we wish you well, so be safe, be kind to one another and trust in God.

A farewell Blessing:

*May the road rise up to meet you.  
May the wind always be at your back.  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
and rains fall soft upon your fields.  
And until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

Yours in Christ,  
**Peter**