

Team Ministry - On a Journey

Here we are in a new year, and our journey together with our friends in Eynesbury and Love's Farm, and the new friends we don't know yet who will be moving into Wintringham, is now well and truly under way.

As many will already know, I was made Priest-in-Charge of Eynesbury in addition to St Neots on Sunday 13th January. Archdeacon Hugh conducted the legal part of the proceedings between the 9.30 and 11.15 services and members of both congregations were there, as well as some from St Neots. It was a fitting occasion and as I look forward to an ever closer partnership between the two parishes, I ask for your prayers – for me, but also for the process as we move forward. This is not an end in itself, nor a stop-gap measure, but a preliminary step to establish the framework for the eventual structure of the team.

Because moving forward is what we have been doing over the past few weeks and after about six months of general discussions, a small group planning group made up of clergy, churchwardens and other lay members of both churches, chaired by Janet Perrett, the lay chair of St Neots Deanery, began to meet in mid-October and has made astonishingly rapid progress in writing a profile for the new team, and defining the role that we want to create for the new priest colleague we will be recruiting to spearhead outreach to schools, young families and those whom we do not currently connect with across the town.

Such has been our progress, that we were able to sign off the draft profile at our meeting on 10th January. Subject to final diocesan approval, this is the document that will be sent out to prospective candidates for the new post of team Vicar. Copies of the draft have been presented to our PCCs and it is on display in both our churches. It is also uploaded to the St Neots Parish website at stneots.org/content/pages/documents/1547717853.pdf

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who took part in the planning meetings for the spirit of enthusiastic cooperation in which they were conducted and the very real sense that the Holy Spirit has led and guided us through what is quite a radical change for both our traditional churches. I would specially like to thank Janet Perrett for chairing so effectively and for making sure that we didn't just sit round talking, but actually got on and did some work, and for editing our disparate contributions into something so coherent and vital. I would also like to thank Dale White for turning our text into such an attractive document.

The profile aims briefly to describe the situation as it is now, and the nature and scale that faces the church as we adapt our ministry and especially our outreach into our changing and expanding communities, into a society in general that has changed radically

over the past thirty or forty years in its attitudes to church and to faith in general, and to a family dynamic that is vastly different from the ones in which many of us grew up. The only constant that we can be sure of, is that change is not something that happens once and then subsides, but that things are always going to change, and that we as the church must now be ready to change our approaches in ways that we cannot predict. Because we live in unpredictable times, we have deliberately aimed to be very flexible in the way we have set out what we want the new Team Vicar to do. We know that we want to bring more and more people to faith in Jesus Christ, to make more disciples, and to engage them in new and different activities. But the ways in which this will be done will evolve and change as other factors change, so we haven't set out a detailed list of tasks. How our new colleague will go about this work will depend on so many different factors that we can't know about now, that this would be too restricting. And we will work together as a team, modelling our diocesan aim to create a 'blended economy of church' – in committing to maintain the traditional ministry that already goes on, and building missional communities and fresh expressions of church, and also in working across the whole spectrum of Anglicanism to embrace evangelical, middle-of-the-road, and catholic expressions in one team. And we will commit to learn from one another as we come together as a team.

The Revd Dr Jeremy Morris, Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge University recently wrote something that we have quoted in our draft profile:

'[The Church] ought to be relentlessly inclusive and at the same time confident in its values and traditions. Reconciling these two things requires a lot of hard work, but also requires a readiness to change, and above all a willingness to listen to others and to learn from them. We have to encounter others wherever they may be – and that means tearing down the walls of our own defensiveness and insecurity. Only then can the church truly be an inclusive community.' This is what we are aiming for in building our new team. As we say in the document: 'We are, we think and believe, moving forward in just this way in Eynesbury, St Neots and Love's Farm, and we hope to find a priest who will join in joyfully and enthusiastically to travel with us.'

The diocesan strategy, and our own parish development plans, embody the commitment to 'Engage, Deepen, and Grow' in our faith and in our church life, and we acknowledge that this is a lifelong ambition. For team ministry is not a destination – it is a journey and the journey with God and in God never comes to an end – in this world or the next.

Do have a look at the profile. I hope that you are as excited as I am!

Yours ever in Christ
Fr Paul