

# Where are we now?

A letter to the congregation from  
Antony Spencer, Interim Vicar and  
Debby Bridge and Brennan Horne,  
Church Wardens



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**December 2014**

Dear friends,

As we come to the end of 2014 we thought it would be helpful to give an update of where we are just now and also to outline some of the plans for the year ahead. We're sorry if this seems a lot to take in, but we are keen to give as much information as we can to inform and encourage your prayers as we move into a New Year.

Firstly, we're pleased to give some feedback on the outcome of the 'count' and the response to the gift day that we undertook in October.

## **Numbers attending**

The average Sunday attendance in October was 480 adults and 135 children; 615 in total across all three services. (This is a 'raw' figure which includes visitors and those who attended more than one service). This is an encouraging result because it represents an increase of 14% (77 people) on the similar figure reported last year. In the previous three years we had recorded a total reduction of 219 people so it is encouraging to record such a good increase this year.

## **Financial Position**

This encouragement also reflects in the church's finances and we are so grateful for such a good response to the gift day. Whereas we originally forecast a significant deficit in 2014 we now expect to break even where income (including bequests and special gifts) matches our expenditure.

For 2015, although we are still forecasting a deficit, this is substantially less than what was originally predicted before the gift day. The PCC felt that, as the deficit was at a much more manageable level, the budget could be set without having to consider further cost savings above those already planned. David Harvey and the Finance team continue to monitor this very carefully and there will be further reports on the situation as we go through the year.

We are so grateful to everyone who has responded with such generosity, so thank you.

On his recent visit Russ Parker remarked that increased attendance and increased giving is indicative of HOPE for the future. This is a conclusion that we wholeheartedly endorse and which is also reflected in the improved general atmosphere in the church – something that is commented on by church members and visitors alike.

## Preparing for the future

Six months ago we published the 'Overview of the Interim Priorities' which set out the position and priorities in this interim period. In that pamphlet we identified three priorities. More recently these priorities have been developed and restated using the image of preparing a ship for the next stage of a journey. The three priorities or tasks have been restated as,

1. Repairing the storm damage.
2. Making sure the vessel is in good order.
3. Appointing a new captain.

We give more details of each of these tasks below but the most important development however, is that we have set ourselves a target time frame for all of this.

The situation remains that although he is no longer involved in leading St John's, Nigel technically remains the vicar until he resigns. Accordingly, the process of finding a new vicar may not start until after Nigel has resigned and has moved out of the vicarage. Notwithstanding this, the PCC, at its meeting on 17th November, agreed that we should make all necessary preparations so that as a church community we are in a position to appoint a new vicar by **Autumn 2015**.

We see the benefit of using this timetable to direct our efforts but, at the same time, we recognise that it may not be possible to meet this target because of the various factors beyond our control.

So, returning to the tasks and priorities of this time.

### I. Repairing the Storm Damage

The storm has been the lead up to, the necessity for, and the aftermath of the listening process, and the publication of the report on the Health of St John's which resulted in Nigel di Castiglione relinquishing his responsibilities as vicar on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2014. Damage has been caused to the life and reputation of St John's as well as to many individuals (including Nigel and his family).

Good progress is being made in rebuilding trust and relationships. The atmosphere in church is much improved and, as we have noted, there is a tangible sense of purpose and hope as we look to the future. However, there remain some people for whom the problems and damage still loom large who would not feel so positive. There remains more to do; particularly in open communication, recognising and valuing different perspectives and promoting personal and corporate repentance. Not all of the damage can necessarily be repaired before the next stage of the journey begins but enough of it must be completed so that the church can confidently and in unity embark on the next stage of the journey. We would see that the following need to happen before then;

Nigel's resignation is necessary both to bring closure and also to allow the process of finding a new vicar to begin. Although there is nothing we can report at this time, Bishop David has told us that he is in close touch with Nigel.

At an appropriate time but following Nigel's resignation, Russ Parker's healing process must be completed with a public service enacting togetherness, signifying the settling of any significant remaining differences and evidencing a readiness to move forward as a community.

## **2. Making sure the vessel is in good order for the next stage of the journey**

The second task in this interim time is to examine areas of the church's life and way of operating to ensure that they are in good working order and fit for purpose. As previously reported, the Diocesan Secretary Andrew Halstead is in the process of preparing a report for the PCC about Governance. See Antony Spencer's blog <http://antony.stjohns-church.co.uk/> where this is described.

Other areas being looked at include welcome and integrating people into church, our service pattern and liturgical input, communications, small groups, staff team organisation etc.

## **3. Appointing a new Captain**

There are various preliminary steps that we need to undertake so that we are ready for the formal consultation with the Bishop that will trigger the start of the search for a new vicar.

Prior to producing a Parish Profile which sets out the life, setting and aspirations of the church before God, the PCC together with senior pastoral staff, will take some extended time in February 2015 to begin to consult on key aspects. These will include;

- (a) What are the Church's general expectations and aspirations before God for the next stage of the journey?
- (b) Based on (a) above what are the essential and desirable characteristics of a new leader?
- (c) Though the PCC will need to take a lead on this it is also important for the church community as a whole to have opportunity to express its views and understanding before God on (a) and (b) above. Dedicated discussion and prayer times will need to be arranged when as a community we can seek 'the mind of Christ' together.

When we are formally consulted about the appointment of a new vicar the church needs to encourage the Patron and Bishop to follow an appropriate and comprehensive selection process.

All of the forgoing takes place as we continue to engage in our purpose of loving God and making Him known as we make disciples and seek the extension of God's Kingdom. This is not a fallow time; the ship is not tied up in harbour so to speak, but is moving even as we make preparations before God for the future.

## What part can you play in preparation for the next stage of the journey?

Here are some suggestions ...

### Pray:

- For Nigel and Annie and a suitable new position for them.
- For the PCC, the Wardens, Antony and the pastoral staff team in this process of preparation.
- For discernment for all of us to hear God's word.
- For the Bishop, the Church Society (our Patrons) and the selection process we will embark on, in due course.
- For the new vicar the Lord is preparing to come to lead us.
- For us as a community in this season of change ... that God will continue to fulfil His purpose in us and through us.

**Be ready** to play your part when the opportunity comes to meet together and discuss our aspirations before God etc.

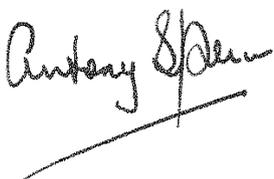
**Play your part** in repairing the 'storm damage' and contributing to the health of St John's.

Examine yourself before the Lord and turn away from making any judgements about others or words, actions or attitudes that He reveals are offensive to Him. (Psalm 139: 23-24)

Releasing anyone who has hurt us into God's care and blessing through forgiveness.

Finally we declare great blessing on you and your family this Christmas time as we celebrate 'God with us'. May we together look forward with confidence to all that the Lord has for us as a community in the year ahead.

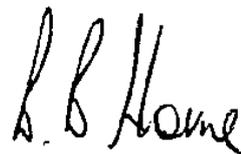
With all good wishes,



Antony Spencer



Debby Bridge



Brennan Horne