

Letter from the Vicar

Friday 16 October

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I don't know if this true for you but for me time seems to be going much faster. It doesn't seem possible that a week has passed since I last wrote to you, and yet the calendar tells me otherwise. On paper, my week looked fairly quiet – not too many fixed appointments – but these weeks are always deceptive. Although they provide quite a lot of space to make pastoral phone calls and fulfil the necessary administrative tasks of ministry as Vicar within a large parish and as Rural Dean, they normally end up busier than when the diary is chocker-block and often lead to more tasks being added to the 'to-do' list. Despite the busy-ness, it has been a joy this week to reconnect with some of you whom I have not seen or spoken to in a long while and to hear how you getting on. With increased restrictions being implemented not that far away in London, and case numbers and admissions to hospital in our area fluctuating, I am re-doubling my efforts to contact as many folk as possible. We will obviously review what we are doing in terms of services and pastoral care as circumstances change but I hope that, through the contact of phone buddies and friends within the Church, most members of our worshipping community will have some contact with the Church. If this is not the case for you, please do get in touch.

Last week I promised to keep you up-to-date on various plans that are formulating and on proceedings at our APCM. The APCM was relatively uneventful (other than having to be conducted behind masks and socially distanced!). Please see the Newsletter to see and pray for those elected to various offices in the life of this Parish.

In a couple of weeks' time we will begin the Season of Remembrance. This will start on Sunday 1 November with All Saints' Sunday when we will give thanks for Ruth's ministry among us these last 2 years and pray God's blessing on her as she retires from licenced parochial ministry. All who who like to attend Ruth's final service in the Parish are warmly invited. Sadly, restrictions mean that we cannot safely hold a reception after the service so instead we plan to invite Ruth back when restrictions are lifted so that we can celebrate together. Later that Sunday, at 4.00pm, we will host our annual Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance for the Departed where families of those who have died or who have been interred during the past year are invited to light candles in memory of their loved ones, hear the message of Christian hope, and listen to uplifting music. To ensure that we are able to accommodate as many people as possible, comply with *Track & Trace* and *the rule of 6*, we are inviting families to attend via a free ticket available from www.ticketsource.co.uk/booking/t-zmgpog. This will automatically take away seats to enable social distancing. We also have in place ways for handling and lighting candles and placing them in crosses in ways which reduce contact. Our choir will lead the music once more whilst the names of departed loved ones will be read out.

On Monday 2 and Wednesday 4 November we will be holding our annual All Souls' services when the names of loved ones, friends, and former clergy who have died in former years will be remembered. Times of these services can be found in the November Magazine or the Newsletter and all the appropriate Covid guidance will be in force. If you would like someone remembered by name at these services please would you write their names on the lists in all of our churches.

On Sunday 8 November the nation will observe Remembrance Sunday. Over the last few weeks I have been in discussions with Dacorum Borough Council and the Royal British Legion regarding whether a Parade/Service at the Town War Memorial, next to St John's, might be possible. Regrettably, both the Council and the RBL have decided not to hold either of these events this year. Their Press Release can be found here: www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/all-news/2020/10/13/join-us-for-virtual-remembrance-event Although this is very disappointing, as a Parish we will be observing Remembrance Sunday in all 3 of our churches.

At St John's we will hold our usual Parish Eucharist at 10.00am which will lead into an Act of Remembrance at 11.00am when we we will observe the 2minute silence and lay wreaths at the High

Altar. I envisage that, although people have been told not to gather at the War Memorial, there will still be a gathering there so I am hoping we might be able to put our speakers outside (facing the War Memorial) so that they can at least join in with the exhortation, Last Post, silence, Reveille, and Kohima epitaph. I am also hopeful that Civic representatives may be available to lay wreaths.

At St Francis' we will likewise hold Mass at 10.00am leading into an Act of Remembrance, and at St Stephen's the service will begin with the Act of Remembrance at 11.30am. We are not planning on ticketing these services at the moment. If you are not able to attend one of these services you might like to follow the RBL's advice to place a poppy in your window and stand on your doorstep for the 2minutes silence. Observances will also be available on the BBC for you to join.

Towards the end of the month we enter into Advent – the season of preparation for the coming Light of the World. I'm aware that Covid restrictions coupled with dark winter nights leads will lead to a depleted attendance at our Advent Carol Service. This year we are therefore planning to host a virtual Advent Reflection of music, prayer, and readings. This will be available on our website. If you are not internet literate I am hopeful we can make DVDs/CDs available.

To kick-off Advent for children we are going to hold a Children's Praise Service on Sunday 29 November at 3.00pm where there will be music, prayer, and craft involving making their own Advent Wreaths.

This now leads me to how I hope we will be able to observe Christmas. Christmas services are usually very well attended with approximately 1500 people joining us for worship on Christmas Eve into Christmas Day. It will not be possible to accommodate these numbers this year if we only do the same things. Therefore, to make ourselves as available as possible I propose the following:

Sunday 20: 9 Lessons and Carols 4.30pm and 6.30pm

This will be sung entirely by the choir, with the assistance of St John's Ensemble. Free tickets will be required, as above, to maximise safety and capacity.

23 & 24: 2.30pm and 4.30pm Christingle Services and 6.30pm Crib Services – each day.

I will give more details nearer the time but admission will be by free ticket.

11.30pm Midnight Mass – at St John's

Christmas Day: 10.00am Parish Christmas Eucharist at St John's and at St Francis'.

We are also planning our Christmas Tree Festival with a difference this year. Half will be inside and half outside St John's. There will still be Carol Singing (but outside) this year. I will give more details next week about sponsorship and involvement following on from another planning meeting this coming week.

I hope this is all helpful information and will assist in your planning for Christmas and the lead-up. It is important to stress that *Christmas isn't cancelled... but it will be different*. We are working on our Christmas publicity and hope that all our plans will be possible.

If you've lasted this long into the letter, thank you for reading it, and I leave you with my prayers for each of you; keep safe; and remain secure in the knowledge of our God who loves us, cares for us, and enfolds us in his arms.

In Christ,



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