

Letter from the Vicar

Friday 23 October

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In a year that has been filled with rather negative, anxiety-inducing, news I should like to share with you some good news for a change. Earlier this week, whilst taking some leave in Scotland, Fr Benjamin popped the question to the lovely Liz Griffiths who joyously consented to marry him. Below is a picture of the happy couple. Liz and Fr Ben met when he moved to Portsea – she is his organist. Obviously a date has not yet been set for their upcoming nuptials but I'll keep you posted. I'm sure you will want to join with me in congratulating them on this delightful news.

In last week's letter I promised to update you on our plans for this year's Christmas Tree Festival. At a planning meeting last night we finalised the number of trees – 11 outside and 11 inside. As always we hope these trees will be sponsored by individuals/schools/local businesses. If you would like to sponsor a tree, or know someone who might, please speak to Jean Garner. It will also be possible to sponsor part of a tree as bringing the event outside has raised the costs of putting this on. For information, this year we hope to have outside 2 extra-large trees requiring £120 of sponsorship per tree, and 9 large trees requiring £80 of sponsorship per tree. The trees inside church have already been sponsored – primarily by our local schools. Due to social distancing and the restrictions on indoor events we are not able to run the Festival as in previous years. We will not be charging entry but rather asking for a donation towards the work of the Church. Our primary aim, through the Festival this year, is to promote the news that Christmas isn't cancelled and to be *A light that shines in the darkness*. The Festival will run from 17-22 December with Festive refreshments (Hot Dogs and Glühwein) served on the Saturday. On the Saturday we will also have outdoor Carol Singing and produce for sale. In the lead-up to the Festival please can I implore you to help advertise this event by popping a poster in your window/liking our Facebook page/forwarding details to friends.

A lot of my time this week has been taken-up with Deanery affairs in my capacity as Rural Dean of Hemel Hempstead. Some of it involved a lot of paperwork (not my favourite pastime) whilst the most rewarding was finally being able to meet – physically – with my clergy and ministerial colleagues for worship, support, and to exchange ideas. We met at St John's; what a joy to be able to preside at the High Altar as my colleagues sat in the now open quire area. We shared ideas and current practice and how we each feel we are doing. One of the common issues all the churches in Hemel is facing is how to connect or reconnect with those who have got out of the habit/practice of coming to church or who are anxious about what it will be like when they do. I'm aware of many in this parish who fit into this category, and thought it might be helpful to share some of the feedback I have received. The overwhelming response is that we are managing the risks very well and enabling people to feel comfortable in worship. People are being friendly and supportive but almost universally respecting other people's space. Face coverings are being worn and hand sanitiser used. The weirdest thing for many has been not being able to sing, although for others this has been a welcome change as they don't like singing. The restrictions on our services have made it particularly hard for families with young children as we are not able to offer our usual Junior Church and other facilities but that has not stopped families returning (which has been a joy). If you are feeling anxious about returning do please be in touch and we might be able to help you. We are also offering numerous services so if being around larger numbers is an issue we can steer you towards a less frequented service. Ultimately we are here to support you and we will do that in whatever way is most appropriate for you. I hope that those who are joining our Parish Eucharist online are finding it a helpful vehicle for connecting with God and our common life together.

On that note of support, you may have noticed a man who has worshipped with us since the early summer. He is a Christian refugee from Iran and sought us out as a place to be quiet and pray. This past week he was surprised to have been re-housed in south London so, sadly, I doubt we will see him again. But in his email to me explaining his move he said how our Church family had welcomed him warmly and enabled him to be filled with the grace and blessing of the Lord Jesus. What a wonder testimony to how we welcome others. He also shared this verse of scripture, which I hope might sustain us all as indeed it has him:

“The Lord is the one who will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or abandon you. Do not be afraid or discouraged.”

Deuteronomy 31:8

May these words sustain you during the coming week and I leave you, as always, 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,

Mike

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Liz and Fr Ben