

Dear all,

All of a sudden, it seems that everything is flying at me at once. My to do list seems to be endless, and the number of notes I make in the middle of the night is covering my desk. I know this is not unique to me. Through Helen, and our other school folk, I know too that they are almost overwhelmed with all they are facing at the beginning of this new term. Please do pray for our schools – headteachers, teachers, support staff, students, governors, and parents – especially as they have to cope with the aftermath of the COVID disruptions, and face the uncertain future.

One of the big challenges facing us now is the Resourcing Sustainable Church discussions. I know I have mentioned this a lot recently, but it is a crucial discussion. I wrote this for the September magazine, and am repeating it here to ensure that I get the widest possible audience.

I have just returned home from a PCC meeting where we discussed, amongst other business, the diocesan Resourcing Sustainable Church initiative, and the Mission Action Plan process we are currently engaged upon.

We have received about a couple of dozen responses, which represents something like about 1/5 of us – though this is quite a good result for this kind of survey.

We did not discuss the responses received – that is for the meeting on the 11th September. But we did discuss some comments picked up in the process. One response that cropped up again and again, though expressed in various ways, was essentially “why bother. They’ve already decided what they’re going to do.” This combined with “we’ve done it before, and nothing seems to happen”.

I have a lot of sympathy with this view. The Church of England has had so many initiatives in the past few decades, most of which seem to be touted as the great answer to declining numbers and influence of the church... and most of which seem to have little obvious effect. Our diocese has not been immune to this.

So, what makes it different this time?

Firstly, we must be upfront about the reasons that we are having these discussions. We find ourselves in the context of falling church attendance, ageing congregations, a national shortage of clergy, and dwindling finances (a significant percentage of which is swallowed up by the heritage buildings we own and look after). If we were a business, we would be a failing business. And we know what happens to failing businesses! As I said in my last magazine letter, it will not go away – we cannot just bury our heads in the sand, and think everything will be the same as it always has been.

But the church is not a business. There is so much of what makes us special – holy, if you like, set apart – does not fit a business model, and cannot be quantified by cash value, the ‘bottom line’.

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the situation. The ministry of the church has to be sustainable, and sustained. Hence the title ‘Resourcing Sustainable Church’, with the sub-title ‘A Time to Change Together’.

The presence of the word ‘Together’ is very significant. “They” have not already decided what will happen, except in very broad terms. “They” are leaving it up to individual churches to identify how they see themselves as the church of God in their community, and how they can develop this in communion and partnership with other local churches. As part of this, we have embarked on the Mission Action Plan (MAP) journey – in order to identify, encourage and develop our unique role within in our community.

Again, as I said in my last letter, I cannot emphasise enough that this is something that concerns each and every one of us. Please do engage with it prayerfully. Do discuss it among yourselves, and your friends... We need to work to ensure that it is 'we' who decide, not 'them' (whoever 'they' are).

On 11th September, we will gather to discuss this further, and put some meat on the bones. We will spend from 11.00 to 12.30 examining what sort of church we are, our strengths and weaknesses, what we are capable of etc. We will break for a lunch hour (please bring a packed lunch), and perhaps continue a much more informal chat, then from 1.30-3.00pm we will look towards the future, and determine a vision for it.

"We've done it before, and nothing seems to happen". Perhaps... but we now have a chance to write a different ending. If MAP works as it should, we have realism, attainability and accountability. We will have outcomes that we can achieve, and celebrate on the way. "Nothing will happen" only if we let it!

So please do get involved. It is the future of YOUR church... the church of your community. We need the dreamers, the cynics, the tangential thinkers, as well as those who value the tradition they have inherited. We need YOU!

Sunday is the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity (Proper 18). It will be an All-Age Communion, when we will be thinking of 'next steps'. We will be praying for all those who will be going back to school. But the main part of the service will be the baptism of baby Savannah. The hymns will be 'Sing Hosanna' [Sing Hosanna - Give Me Oil In My Lamp | Bible Songs for Kids - YouTube](#), 'Be still' [Be still for the presence of the Lord - YouTube](#), and 'One more step' [One more step along the world I go \(with Lyrics\) - YouTube](#).

As last week, we will be recording the service, and uploading it later. The recording will be in 2 parts – the actual baptism will not be videoed, partly due to privacy considerations, and partly practical considerations of moving to the back of the church.

The lectionary readings for the service are Isaiah 35: 4-7a; James 2:1-17 & Mark 7:24-end. The Psalm is Psalm 146. However, due to the baptism, we will just be having the reading from Mark 10:13-16.

Anglican chant: [Psalm 146 "Praise the Lord O My Soul" - YouTube](#)

And a modern version: [What Joy \(Psalm 146\) - Sarah Emerson \(with lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

And a Hebrew version (with dance) [ELIHANA - HALLELUYAH - PSALM 146 תהילים פרק - היוללה הנחילא - קמ- YouTube](#)

Anthems suggested for this Sunday include:

[God be in my head - John Rutter - YouTube](#)

[Oculi omnium \(1927\) - YouTube](#) Charles Wood

[Hear My Words, Ye People - YouTube](#) C Hubert H Parry

A reminder - one alternative style service that has been suggested is that we hold a short Pet Service, before the main Sunday service. To this end we would like to invite folk to:



Pet Blessing Service

(cuddly toys also invited!)

The Priory Church

Outside – weather permitting!

Sunday 19th September at 9.00am

Please make sure all pets are under control, and that you are prepared to help clear up if there are any 'accidents'

Another service coming up is the Nations' Climate Sunday Service at Glasgow cathedral on Sunday 5th September. You may recall we held our own earlier this year. To tune in to this national event, please book online at [Nations' Climate Sunday Service: Churches Prepare for COP 26 Tickets, Sun 5 Sep 2021 at 16:00 | Eventbrite](#)

The service starts at 4.00pm, so you should still be able to make Choral Evensong!



Stay safe.

Blessings and love

Mark