



## “In Touch” Issue no. 9 February 2016



“We are all one body because we share one bread”. This is what we proclaim in the Eucharist, as we prepare to share the bread broken for us at the altar. These words are at the heart of what we are called to be as Christians worshipping together as a church: diverse, of all sorts of different opinions and gifts, yet called by God to live as one community, united in Christ. St Paul put it very bluntly to the society of his time, which was very conscious of its ethnic, religious and class barriers:

“We are clothed with Christ himself, so there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves, free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3.28.)

I write this at a time when it seems to be increasingly difficult to fill the jobs that need doing to enable church at St Marys to be run as we have known it. A vacancy leaflet has recently been issued and I hope that everyone- new to the church or here many years- will really consider what they can offer to enable these positions of service to be filled. My thanks to those who have already responded, for example by assisting in baptism visiting and organising the summer fete (11<sup>th</sup> June).

Over the course of ten years here as Vicar I have observed that difficulties often arise when changes are needed, especially when someone has retired/died/ moved or just decided to lay something down because they felt need of rest and refreshment.

The good news is that there is also a culture of generosity and welcome to be had at St Mary’s; new people continue to remark upon it, and new people have joined us and got involved. Yet facts have to be faced: we simply cannot limp along in 2016 with posts unfilled and fewer people trying to maintain what always used to be done- both ‘in front’ and behind the scenes. I observe too that it is too often the same people trying to do more, rather than more people trying to take things on.

Might I suggest, as parish priest, that we have some questions to address?

- a. Will we decide to create a culture of encouragement and not to contribute towards, nor acquiesce in, critical comments about those who are trying to serve in our church? (See James 3 vv 1-12 for some wisdom on the reality of human community!) We need to sign up to that, each and every one, if we want that to be true in our church. People need to know that they will be supported; even offering to serve takes enough courage! Between us we have many skills- let’s celebrate and nurture what God has entrusted us with.
- b. Can we look at what can be done differently, and what might be done less often, or even discontinued, if we have fewer people able to offer their time? Much of our congregation is ageing, and many younger people are working huge hours/difficult shifts and therefore scarcely around for their own loved ones, yet alone church commitments. Grumbling about how it used to be won’t solve the problems, but solutions can be found if we all come at it with a can-do, faith-filled attitude. It’s your church, and – like many smaller congregations in country places - everyone needs to pull together to ensure things flourish.
- c. Can we each look at ourselves honestly during Lent-which is a fitting time given to us for self-examination and repentance? Do we hesitate to step forward because we fear we might fail to do the task according to some others’ expectations? (Our Lent course *The King’s Speech* has a lot to say about the paralysing effect that fears and lack of encouragement can have on human flourishing.)
- d. Are we willing to ask God to show us who could benefit with kindness from us? Could we make the effort to offer a bit more friendship to those we don’t really know? Are there those about whom we have spoken critically, whom we could approach with love and contrition? (I am always brought up short by the words of our Lord’s Prayer: ‘forgive us our sins, as we.....’) That takes courage and humility, but it’s God’s way.

It is still my intention to look at our MAP: our Mission Action Plan. (There had been a special time for the PCC planned for the end of January but I decided to postpone it due to Katherine's recovery from surgery.) However, I am more and more persuaded that it should be a **general parish meeting**, like we had in 2012, not merely a meeting of the PCC. I like to think we could have it before our Annual Parish Church Meeting (which is to be held on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April). We need the chance to ponder things together, maybe breaking into small groups, and to consider prayerfully what changes we can make to enable our church to function well. If not before, maybe we will do it on that day, and have a bring and share lunch afterwards? What do people think?

May we all approach the future full of thanksgiving for all that God gives us, facing the future with joy and expectancy, because He is with us.

With my love and prayers

***Richard***