

Pilgrims on a journey

The summer is here. With any luck we'll be enjoying some warmer weather and long sunny days. The holiday season is approaching and for the younger ones there will be the excitement of looking forward to the last day of school or college term, with a few weeks of relaxation and enjoyment without the pressures of homework or exams stretching ahead. If you're lucky enough to be going away on holiday, there's the added anticipation of new places to visit or old haunts to return to, friends and relatives whom we perhaps only see at holiday times and the prospect of new and exciting experiences, the creation of special memories to enrich our lives. Whether you are going away or just spending a more relaxing time at home, I would like to wish everyone an enjoyable and restful summer.

Meanwhile, parish life of course continues and although there will be a lot less in the way of special events going on through the summer, there will still be our work of pastoral care to attend to, a few things to deal with that tend to get left to the quieter times, and our ongoing plans and strategy to think about and move forward.

Our Development Action Plan, which has been put together from work that was done in groups a couple of years ago and from the strategy day that we held back in January of this year, has been presented and talked about and the PCC has approved a number of areas of work that we are now putting in hand. It was no surprise at all that the work-strand that attracted the most volunteers was the one focusing on developing the facilities in our lovely church building, and looking at new ways in which the building can serve the wider community. Less popular by a long way are the strands concerned with Community Action (though the initiative to help the homeless is well-supported) and with Mission and Witness, a broad heading encompassing not just our outreach and our charitable giving, but our own faith development through bible study, courses and discussion groups. If anyone has a heart to be involved in the planning of either of these two strands please contact Ann Williams (Community) or me (Mission and Witness). One of the resources that I will be looking to roll out in the autumn is the newly launched Ely Diocese Way of Life, a package of material that can be run out as a course (and at first may look and feel like a course), but forms the basis of a way of Christian living that runs through everything we say and do, throughout the whole of our life. More about that in the September issue of The Messenger. There will also be another opportunity within our deanery, for those who wish to go broader and deeper with God, to engage with the largely bible-based diocesan discipleship course. Those who have already undertaken this ten-week programme have found it to be of great and lasting value.

In all our planning, we have always to be very mindful of the way things are changing rapidly in our town and community and how the Ely Diocesan strategy for market towns will feed into the ways in which we look to engage with new and existing housing developments and their communities. This gives me an opportunity to announce that the Revd Helene Tame who has been our ecumenical Pioneer Minister (using the title Community Chaplain) for the Loves Farm development since 2014, and as a newly ordained minister in the Church of England was assigned to me for her ongoing training, has had her curacy signed off by the Bishop of Ely as having been successfully completed. This means that Helene is now officially an associate priest in the parish instead of a curate, while continuing to exercise her community chaplaincy. As the expansion of the new housing across Cambridge Road to form the new Wintringham development, together with a planned eastern extension of Loves Farm, will over the next few years significantly add to the housing across both the parish of St Neots and the parish of Eynesbury, we confidently expect Helene to expand and develop her ministry in that part of the town. As the pioneer ministry funding stream from the United Reformed Church comes to an end next year, we anticipate that this work will continue to be funded through a partnership between the Diocese of Ely and the URC.

All this indicates a time of great change, not just in terms of expansion and new housing, but change that will embrace all of us. Discussions are now in hand with the aim of creating the long-awaited team ministry covering our side of the river Great Ouse. Over the past few years, we have developed very close working between the two historic parishes of St Neots and Eynesbury and the time has now come to grow this informal partnership, with Loves Farm/Wintringham as the third element, into a formal team in and through which we will commit to working together to offer ministry to the whole town, fully cooperating in our work to make God's kingdom come in the wider St Neots, recognising that we are all pilgrims together on this journey. Commitment to this team means that we will be able to recruit a third full time priest to live and work in Eynesbury, continuing the great work that the Revd Debbie Noonan was able to do, while contributing expertise and enthusiasm to areas of ministry across the whole town where we are aware of a particular need. While discussions and plans for this are at an early stage at the moment, I think that we all recognise that this will focus especially on work with children and young families.

All of this is very exciting. Team ministry has been on the agenda since before I came here in 2008, and it is very satisfying to see that we have reached the stage where it is a real possibility. So while I hope that all of us will have the opportunity to relax a bit during this summer, there will still be a lot of work going on behind the scenes. Please

pray for all of us as we look to the future with renewed confidence in the purposes of God for his people in this town.

Yours ever in Christ

Fr Paul