



MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM RECTOR JANUARY 2021

Restrictions. It's a word that I've heard a lot, said a lot, and written a lot since March last year. Restrictions on travelling, meeting, hugging; restrictions affecting family, work, and leisure – and church too. We all know it's necessary, and we're all longing for it to be over.

A remarkable programme of mass vaccination has just begun, raising hopes for the day when the restrictions imposed to stem the spread of the Coronavirus can finally be lifted. But that's not going to happen for a while. Life is going to have to carry on under significant restrictions for some time, including church life.

In my December message, I wrote about the importance of watching, waiting, and listening together for how God is at work here in Ashford and how he is calling us to be part of His work. Since then, the PCC has agreed to embark on 'Mission Action Planning' as a way to do that. It's an idea that's been around in the Church of England for a while, and its aim is to help churches organize their life together so that they share most effectively in God's mission in their community.

Ordinarily, we might have looked to get things started by holding a big Parish away-day, with lots of activities and enticing refreshments. Restrictions mean we can't do that, but there are still plenty of things we can do. Gathering people from across the Parish to talk and pray together online is in some ways actually easier than trying to do it in person.

So this Lent, for the first time we're going to be holding a Parish Lent Course. Called 'Church – What's the Point?', it's designed to get us thinking about key questions to do with Church and mission, as well as about how we can follow Christ more faithfully in our own lives. There'll be more details coming soon, through regular weekly news sheets and on the website. It's just four sessions of an hour each, with a choice of slots at 2 p.m. or 8 p.m. on Wednesdays, beginning on the 24th of February. We're thinking too about ways in which those who're not able to make those slots can still be involved.

I really hope you'll be able to join us. I'm aware that for some of us, life is pretty overwhelming at the moment, and taking on anything new is going to feel difficult. That's partly why we've tried to make sure the time commitment is limited. And we hope this can be a supportive space for those who may be struggling.

I'm planning to be at every session and will be giving a short talk each time. We're also intending to spend half the time each week in small groups of around seven or eight, generally with people from the same congregation, so that there are plenty of opportunities for listening to one another. I'm looking forward to seeing what comes out of those discussions.

'I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,' Paul writes to the Philippians (4.11). That's not because Paul has mastered the power of positive thinking, but because he knows that he always has Christ, that Christ always has work for him to do, and that Christ always equips him for that work, whatever the circumstances. Whatever the restrictions.

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