



MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM RECTOR FEBRUARY 2021

'I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now' (Philippians 1.3–4).

Paul's ministry as an apostle was grounded in prayer. Sharing the gospel with people and praying with them and for them were inseparable. What Paul writes in his letters flowed out of his constant prayers for the communities where he ministered. What they wrote to him surely flowed back into his prayers as well.

The process of 'Mission Action Planning' we are now beginning with the Parish Lent Course is aimed at helping us reflect together on how we can share in God's work as God's church here in Ashford. But our reflection will be weak and superficial unless it's grounded in prayer with and for one another.

Prayer with and for one another needs to be informed by listening to one another. To support one another in prayer, we need to know what burdens people are carrying, and what opportunities they are excited about.

After preaching round the Parish in November and December, since Christmas I've been based in the South East Local Area, and from March I'll be moving on to spend a couple of months with Great Chart, Singleton and St Francis. One thing I noticed early on is that it's not always easy for people from one church to know what's going on in another church within our Parish – and so it's not easy to pray for them either.

Prayer with and for one another also needs to include space for listening to God. What might we hear the Holy Spirit saying about what is happening in our churches and in our town? What can we ask for with confidence in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, because we sense it is close to his heart?

Alongside priorities about mission, the PCC has identified 'praying with and for one another' and 'Strengthening communication' as priorities for 2021. As a first step in addressing them, I'm hoping this will be the last time I send out a message in this format. The plan is that from March onwards, we'll send out a monthly parish bulletin that includes a message from me alongside information about services and other activities and, crucially, about how we can be praying with and for one another in the month ahead.

Many Christians feel a mixture of guilt and inadequacy about prayer: that we ought to do more, and we ought to do better. How to tackle that is a big subject, but it's important that such feelings don't make us give up on prayer. It's one of the great privileges and great responsibilities we all have as members of Christ's body, the church.

Lent can be a good opportunity to deepen the pattern of prayer we are currently following, whatever it may be. Could you make a commitment to pray for our parish and our town each day during Lent? Or to join in weekly with one of the regular opportunities to pray with others online that are currently being offered across the parish? Or to set aside some time to listen for what God is saying to us as the church here in Ashford? Who knows – it might just become a habit!

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