



**ASHFORD TOWN PARISH
MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM RECTOR
May 2021**

Message for May

A few days ago, I went for a walk around Kingsnorth with Geoff Abasolo-Munnery, who is joining us for his curacy at the beginning of July (Geoff introduced himself in last month's edition of *Good News for Ashford*). I warned him as we set off that I have a terrible sense of direction and can get lost pretty much anywhere. Fortunately, he was able to reassure me that his is excellent!

Starting as Team Rector during the pandemic has meant I've done a lot less travelling around and visiting different parts of the parish than I would have done otherwise. That's not great for someone like me who struggles to get their geographical bearings. I'm really pleased that with the warmer weather and the lifting of some restrictions, I'm beginning to find my way around different parts of Ashford, as I meet up with various people outside and share in worship in our re-opened church buildings.

One of the things that's been underlined for me in the initial 'Review' phase of Mission Action Planning is that understanding Ashford takes time and care. It's a growing place, with all the new housing; a changing place, notably with regard to employment patterns; and a place of significant contrasts, with wards among both the most and the least deprived in Kent. Still, it's a place with a recognisable identity: people know where it is, and identify themselves as living here.

That might seem a dull thing to say, but many parishes in the Church of England – perhaps most – no longer correspond to places that mean anything to anyone who's not a church insider. They're often areas of a town whose boundaries may no longer function in other contexts, or groupings of small towns and villages placed together. One of the good things about our parish is that it's a geographical place that remains a social unit – a place that people recognise and identify with, which is what parishes were originally about.

That brings me – via a somewhat roundabout route – to the parish strapline, *Loving God: Serving Ashford*. I realise that with a number of changes happening in our church life, including the forthcoming retirements of two much-valued colleagues, Eve and Caroline, the on-going impact of Covid-19, and the questions that are being raised through the early stage of Mission Action Planning, it's easy to feel disorientated at the moment. It's certainly been happening to me!

But those four words are so helpful for reminding us of our shared journey and the shared purpose that gives it direction. We are here to love God and to serve Ashford. If we can remember that, we should find our way through the present challenges.

Four words, two things – but they're connected. We love God as his people here by serving Ashford: showing God's love in action in this town with generous hearts and deeds, and sharing the good news as opportunity arises of the God who loves us all. And we serve Ashford by loving God in its midst, because Ashford needs God, and needs to know that God is love. We are here to testify to that truth in our worship, in our daily discipleship, and in our common life – the way we relate to one another, the way we treat one another.

If we keep focused on those two things, loving God and serving Ashford, I'm confident we will travel forward together as God's people in this place, where he has appointed us to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last (John 15.16).

The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen