



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

Finding our Passion

I've really enjoyed being with each of our Sunday morning congregations over the past couple of months. I've been preaching about what we've learnt so far through Mission Action Planning and inviting all present to complete the sentence: 'The three things we should be most passionate about in Ashford Town Parish are...'

I'm very grateful to everyone who took the time to fill out the sheet about this and return it to me. The Mission Action Planning Coordinating Group will be looking carefully at the responses, including the comments and suggestions that some people made on their forms. If you've not got round to sending me yours yet – it's not too late, but please do it soon!

We offered fourteen possible phrases for completing the sentence and a space where you could add your own. These are some of the headlines based on the 132 people who've shared their forms with me so far:

- Over 40% of people in our congregations think we should be passionate about 'Serving the community around us'
- Over a third of people in our congregations think we should be passionate about 'Sharing our faith and growing our church'
- Over a quarter of people in our congregations think we should be passionate about 'Being open and hospitable to all'
- Over a quarter of people in our congregations think we should be passionate about 'Offering worship that is inspiring and transformative'
- Over a quarter of people in our congregations think we should be passionate about 'Including people of all ages in our mission and ministry'
- Over a quarter of people in our congregations think we should be passionate about 'Caring when others are hurting'.

It was interesting to see how the pattern of responses varied across our different churches. For instance, 'Sharing our faith and growing our church' was the most popular response in two churches, and one of the least popular responses in two churches as well. In some churches there seemed to be a clear convergence around two or three 'passions', whereas in others the spread was rather more even across the different suggestions.

The Mission Action Planning Group, the Parish Leadership Team and the PCC will be keeping all this in mind as they begin the work of identifying vision and priorities for our parish and its churches in September. Those priorities need to connect with where the passion is in our churches for seeking God's kingdom here in Ashford.

I wonder, though, how easy it is for some of us at the moment to 'find our passion' as members of the church. Although we've been able to take some important steps towards the restoration of church life in its fullness since 19 July, the Covid-19 pandemic still casts long shadows over us all. It's been great to see many of our activities and initiatives starting to get going in the past month or so, with more to come in

September – and not just on Sundays! But things continue to feel pretty fragile. And many of us are feeling pretty fragile.

Perhaps, though, this can also be a good moment to ask: what is it that we really care about? What is that we're really serious about? What is it that we really want to see change in the lives of those around us? What gets us out of bed in the morning? And whatever answers we might give, as followers of Christ we will want to check that our passions are in line with his purposes and his desires for the world he came to save.

The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen