



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

Centred on Jesus

Last month, I wrote about how those who live by faith in the risen Christ can look forward in hope. It's something I've been thinking about a lot as we try to bring into focus our vision, goals, and priorities for the next five years, as part of Mission Action Planning.

At one level, churches are in the same boat as many other institutions in our society at the moment. Like them, we are struggling on (at least) two fronts. Long-term social changes, including a pervasive individualism that locates identity and value within the self, work against the cross-generational loyalty on which historic institutions rely. And then there are the much more immediate effects of the coronavirus pandemic, leaving those still committed to such institutions both exhausted and drained of resources, and in need of extraordinary energy to respond to unfolding change.

But we need to keep coming back to why there is a church at all. As I tried to say in the Lent Course, the church exists to share Christ, God's gift to the world: to share in him through our life together, and to share his gracious presence with the world around us. And those two things go together. We can't share in him without being ready to share what we receive from him with others, and we can't hope to share his good news with others if we are not abiding in him, the true vine.

At the Vision Day with the Parish Leadership Team on 1 September, we started to draft a 'vision statement' to sum up what we want to become as a family of churches in this parish over the next five years. We shared it with the PCC at its meeting in September, where further suggestions were made. It may well get revised again in the coming months, but at the moment it reads:

- centred on Jesus, serving the community, growing in faith.

On 23 October, we're holding an event for all those involved in church leadership in the parish to look at what kind of activities and initiatives we might support over the next five years to help us fulfil that vision. Do feel free to ask any PCC / LLT / LMT / leadership team member about that! I'm looking forward very much to being part of the conversation and to seeing what ideas start to take shape.

While our draft vision statement may well get revised, I really like the way it holds together that 'sharing in Christ' and 'sharing Christ with others' that together define the church. Centred on Jesus: 'without me, you can do nothing' (John 15.5). He is the source of our life, and he is the one who joins us together. But he is also the one who sends us out, to serve the community around us, and to share his good news, so that others can discover and grow in faith with us.

Centred on Jesus, we can face the challenges ahead and do our planning for the future in peace and joy, not fear and anxiety.

The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen