



St Nicholas', Emmbrook
St Paul's, Wokingham
Woosehill Church

from the Rector,
the Rev'd Canon
Richard Lamey

Friday the 2nd of December 2022

To the PCCs and People of Ruscombe, Twyford and Hurst,

**Summarising where we are up to
and exploring where we go next**

Where are we up to?

1. Because of the recent history of the Benefice the Area and Deanery are keen to establish if there are structural reasons for the issues Anna faced and if there are changes we can make during the vacancy which will mean that the post is more attractive when it is advertised, which will then make it easier for the new incumbent to start well when they are licensed.

2. Stephen Pullin and Rhodri Bowen (Archdeacon of Berkshire and Parish Development Advisor) came to meet with the PCCs in September in response to what the PCCs had raised in the previous vacancy meeting. Two alternatives were offered, roughly speaking- to look at becoming one Parish or to think about separating into two Benefices entirely. The Area had no preference on this- SP and RB were trying to get people thinking, reflecting, praying, working out what mattered most and what future God was inviting the Benefice into. The two alternatives offered were not

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intended to be exclusive and, rather, represented permission to think differently about the future and examples of what that might look like.

3. I have not picked up any desire from any of the Churches for a closer relationship which would mean one PCC and more of life shared together. There seems no heart for a closer union, for restructuring and becoming one parish with more interdependence and mutual accountability and sharing of vision, and one PCC, and one set of accounts.

An early suggestion of appointing an Interim Minister to manage a period of change and adjustment on a fixed-term contract also gained little support.

4. Most people seem keenest to try to make things work by maintaining the relationships there are.

5. Some voices have been raised in favour of Hurst separating from Ruscombe and Twyford, with one FTE post at RT and one House for Duty post (HfD) at Hurst. It has been very worthwhile to look into this, both in terms of what this might mean for the Churches and community and what this might mean for mission in the Benefice.

6. RB, Liz Jackson (Acting Archdeacon) and I feel that this is an idea which, on close study, does not seem feasible or easily realisable.

7. Part of that is because of the finances in the parish- there is no clarity around how the benefice could increase its payment of Share from £86,089 for one FTE post in 2023 to £99,926 in 2023 if we were funding one FTE post and a HfD post. At the end of October Hurst had paid £5,000 for 2022- and they paid £18,000 in 2021- so it seems unlikely that they could stretch to over £23,000. RT seem on track to pay just over £60,000 in 2022 but paying for a whole Full Time post would be £76,000 and that seems a big step too.

8. The Diocese may or may not be willing to pay for a house for Hurst's HfD minister- the Archdeaconry Team have different thoughts on that- but it is at least a complication.

9. The biggest issue in all of this is simply that there is a buyer's market for people thinking of doing HfD- the huge majority of posts are simply not being filled and the meeting of Archdeacons in November made it clear to LJ that there is currently a great shortage of candidates for this type of ministry. Noone applied to Winnersh and Bearwood and the three HfD post being currently advertised in Dorchester area had two people look at them and, so far, have no applications.

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10. RB, LJ and I now think that the best way forward is a third way which involves doing proper work in the next weeks which allow us to clarify and focus expectations from each of the three Churches*, hear what their priorities and longings are and map things out in a way which is coherent and deliberate and feeds then into the Parish Profile and the appointment process in the Spring.

11. In all of this we need to keep making space to listen to God and what the Holy Spirit is asking of the Benefice in terms of mission, outreach, new connections, new possibilities- as you have done so far, not least at the day on Saturday at the URC Church.

** I am very conscious that the URC Church is also a partner in this but that feels a separate conversation in some ways, and one which is already underway. Members of that congregation would clearly be welcome to contribute to these conversations as well, of course.*

Exploring where we go next

1. There are obviously a lot of things for the Benefice still to consider, and it might be that there is energy for continuing to pursue either a closer union or separation. Those are options. They may still warrant further discussion.

2. However, RB and I are proposing to plan an intense consultation which will start before Christmas with a questionnaire, be followed up with some meetings in early January and end with a Summary by the end of January which will lead into the Parish Profile if it is accepted by the Benefice as being a firm foundation for the future. This is a third option- to be intentional, precise and specific about what each Church and community should expect from the new Vicar, while also being intentional, precise and specific about the expectations of relationships between the Churches of the Benefice.

3. There are many things to be discussed around this possibility, which might include:

- a) what is the specific call and charism of each Church?
- b) how would each Church prioritise its mission in the community around, and what resources would they like to call on from the Benefice to fulfil that?
- c) what should the Churches be doing together and what should they not be?
- d) how can the Churches support each other better, in a way which draws on their specific strengths and giftings? (Call and gifts are not necessarily the same).

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e) what are the strengths and giftings of the Churches and how can we reset the relationship in a way which allows them to be more obvious and more readily shared and accepted?

f) financially, what is the best balance between RT and H when it comes to Parish Share? Could RT take on more of the burden in order to help H? And how would that then be reflected in proportion of ministerial time?

g) Could that proportionality then be employed across the benefice for the costs of other ministry and the costs of the office?

There are obviously other questions- and we would be very happy to include any and all of them in the conversation. This is a complicated process with a lot of moving parts and a lot of different opinions, insights, ideas. Rhodri and I are hoping to put together a framework which will allow space for all of them to be offered and heard while also ensuring forward momentum through a tight timetable which will allow us to still get on with building a Parish Profile in the Spring.

What to do now?

1. Please continue to pray for everyone making decisions in this area, and for the Churches of the Benefice, and for Anna and Andy in Cardiff.

2. Please continue to pray for the Church you are part of, and for the Churches in the Benefice you are not.

3. Please start to think in more detail about what needs to be put in place if we are going to, together, prepare the ground for a new Vicar to come into post under this structure but with a clear sense of balance and expectations.

4. Please talk about all of this at your House Group, and over coffee, and after Church, and everywhere.

5. Please keep a note of any good ideas you have had as you read this paper so you can share it when the questions come round before Christmas.

6. And thank you for your patience, prayers, grace and understanding over these last months- and, hopefully, in the months to come as well.

God bless, guide, inspire and keep you in this season of Advent and always.

Richard Lamey

(Acting Associate Archdeacon of Berkshire & Area Dean of Sonning)

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