

The State of Play in Ruscombe, Twyford and Hurst on the 16th of December 2022

a Note from the Acting Associate Archdeacon

Update

By the end of 2022 Hurst PCC will have paid over £24,000 in Parish Share, out of the nearly £28,000 they have been asked for. They will be just over £4,000 short on the year. R & T will have paid the £60,000 they are asked for. In total, the two PCCs together will have paid just over £84,000.

Ruscombe and Twyford PCC met on Monday the 5th of December.

Hurst PCC met on Wednesday the 7th of December.

There was a lot of overlap in the concerns and hopes which were expressed in both meetings. There was a genuine openness to what God is asking of each Church and of the Benefice together. There was a focus on mission and community and how we best build the Kingdom. There was an attention to finance and to sustainability. There was talk of alignment of vision and the fact that a benefice with different worship styles has real strengths. There was talk of healing relationships and being deliberate and intentional about how the Benefice should work, setting clear expectations and meeting them. There was agreement on the need to reset relationships and expectations if the benefice is to move forward together, both in terms of how the Churches relate to each other and what is expected of the Vicar.

To generalise, it feels as if Hurst are closer to a decision on the way ahead than R & T who have more to consider and balance. It seems likely that Hurst will conclude their reflection on the future shape of the Benefice before R & T. R & T are still free to make their own decision even after Hurst have made theirs- and it is, of course, possible that PCCs might, at this stage, prefer a different way forward. However, my hope is that both PCCs will agree on the best way forward and commit to making that workable through an honest programme of conversation and decision.

Proposed immediate steps

1. Rhodri Bowen and I would like to invite people to complete the short questionnaire we have drawn up. It asks general questions in a way which will help us gather data and ideas from all of the churches and to spot patterns and priorities. This does not prejudge the decisions of each PCC because planning for the future and engaging with structural issues and relationships will have to happen wherever the benefice is heading. (We are deliberately asking broad questions rather than asking would you like a or b because that is a matter of deep discernment and discussion which it is impossible to frame in a short survey).
2. The Hurst PCC is intending to make a decision on how they see the next years and what their commitment to the benefice is before Christmas.
3. I will meet with the R & T PCC as soon as we can arrange that in January so I can listen more to their thoughts, concerns and hopes.
4. Then, ideally, we will have a joint PCC meeting- or a joint congregational meeting?- in early February where we can present the outcome of the questionnaire and address the decisions of the two PCCs and plot a way forward, both in terms of an appointment of a Vicar and doing the work we need to do within the benefice to make sure that we are in as good a shape as possible when they arrive. Clearly the content of that discussion will be dictated by the decisions/ indications of the two PCCs.

A personal conclusion

My hope and prayer, after attending the Hurst PCC and reading the notes of the meeting of the R & T PCC, is that we can, under God, find a way of working together as one Benefice in a way which is life-giving and rich rather than draining and distracting.

I would certainly like the chance to see if we can do that, through a clear sense of direction and purpose, through healing past hurts and gathering around the things we share in common.

However, a PCC might prayerfully conclude that they need to move in a different direction, which is absolutely their right, and we will engage with that conversation if we need to.

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