

All Saints Alive

READER'S VIEWPOINT

Do we need a new Vicar?

Geoffrey Oates mulls it over

Before anyone accuses me of sedition or blasphemy, let me reassure you that this is a rhetorical question. Helping to run a parish during an interregnum may be a novel and exciting experience at the beginning of the task, but by summer all of us who have taken on extra responsibilities since Bill Kemm's retirement (and since Jean left us) will be counting down the days (and there are very many of us, not just the Readers and Wardens!) In fact, you might find us up on the church tower in September gazing at the horizon for the first sighting of the relief column.

So if you ever overhear the parish Treasurer and myself having a surreptitious chat about declaring UDI from the Diocese and going it alone, don't worry, we're only joking.

But this is a good opportunity to ask a more serious question. What do we want from our Vicar?

There are plenty of easy answers. We need someone to oversee and hold together all the diverse activities that make up our parish life. We need someone to lead our services and preside at Communion. We need someone to expound and interpret God's word and the traditions of our Church in the changing times we live in. We need a wise and compassionate person to turn to at times of doubt and crisis in our lives. We need someone to broaden our vision beyond the walls of our church and the boundaries of our parish, to challenge us to try new things.

Of course, you don't have to be ordained to do any of the above (except baptisms and the Eucharist), and you don't have to be a full time salaried employee of the Church

either. But in any large organisation, you won't get far without some kind of division of labour, and some kind of leadership or management structure.

The Christian Church worked this out very early in its life. If the Church was born on the Feast of Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2, then they only lasted until Chapter 6 before they had their first crisis meeting to sort out internal arguments. The 12 Apostles took charge, and they arranged the election of 7 officers to look after 'internal affairs' amongst the growing community of believers. The Church looks back to this incident as the origination of the office of Deacon, an ordained role, but separate from the office of Priest, and now something of a rarity. The idea behind it, though, was that the Apostles themselves could then be 'freed up' to concentrate on preaching the message of Jesus to the outside world.

Is this a model we should keep before us when we think about our own parish? Should we be looking for someone whose primary role is not to look after us, but rather to bring the Gospel of Christ to those who are outside our worshipping community? It may be OK for a golf club to employ a club professional, a groundsman or a barman (or woman) for the comfort and convenience of its paying members, but the Body of Christ really needs to think bigger than that. There would be less emphasis on the Vicar serving us, and more stress on us helping the vicar as the cutting edge of our outreach to the rest of the parish. Note the word 'helping' – leaving the Vicar to do all of it is not an option.

There are many Christian communities that do not have the luxury of a full time pastor,

and I admire the way some of them get by and thrive with only their own resources. In New Testament times the idea of paying ministers was apparently a delicate issue to some. Despite what some of our hymns say about the Disciples leaving all behind them to follow Jesus, it is clear from the stories of Jesus' appearances after the Resurrection that many of them were able to return almost overnight to their old livelihood as fishermen. I suspect they had kept their day jobs, at least part time, all along.

A few years later, it is clear that some of the Apostles are being supported financially by their fellow believers, so they can pursue their missionary work full time. St Paul, however, appears to take a lot of pride in the fact that he travels the world without asking for any payment, as his trade as a tentmaker enables him to pay his own way anywhere in the Roman World. Many evangelical missionaries try to follow his example today.

But not everyone is St Paul, and I'm not sure St. Paul, for all his boundless physical energy and intellectual vitality, was the right sort of person for the challenges of parish ministry.

What many of us have noticed most since Bill has left us, is the great amount of time he devoted to pastoral visiting – not just to regular members of the congregation, but to the parish at large. Something you don't readily notice until you miss it. Perhaps the greatest asset that our Vicar should have is time, time for people; time that does not have to be squeezed in between meetings and committees and all the other things that can so easily fill our lives.

So, as we are fortunate enough to be able to support a full time vicar, what is it that we should be looking to offer to our Parish? -Someone who is ordained and paid to have time for people.

Vacancy Progress

Geoffrey's article prompts the question 'What is happening about a new priest?' The answer is 'Quite a lot!' The PCC held a number of special sessions last year, culminating in a meeting with the Bishop of

Hertford and the Archdeacon of Hertford. We have agreed a profile of the parish and what we hope for in a priest. If all goes to plan an advertisement will appear in the *Church Times* in February and suitable, short-listed candidates come to see the parish and to attend interviews in March.

We owe a great debt to all who contributed, but especially to Richard Toyn who edited the profile through many drafts and to Wendell Newbold who hunted down some excellent pictures and formatted the final document. The Archdeacon called it an excellent document. We hope it attracts equally high quality candidates!

Helpers Urgently Required!!

All Saints is in urgent need of enthusiastic "Ecclesiastical Cleaning Operatives" to joint an excellent team to work for an hour or two on a 6 weekly rota basis under the care and direction of a Team Leader. Age and experience no barrier!



In other words... We need people to join the Cleaning Rota Teams!! If you have an hour or so to spare every 6 weeks, and are agile enough to wield a duster and or a broom we would love to hear from you.

School age participants and those with excellent singing voices are even more welcome as the choir cleaning team is also in need of helpers, and the role will provide excellent grounding and experience for the future!!



The cleaning teams vary the times they come into the Church during their "duty week", therefore we can find a team that cleans at a time to suit you!

Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you. Alison Walker – Cleaning Rota Co-ordinator and Dorothy Toyn.