

Saturday, 14 December 2024

Dear Parishioners,

This letter comes with many mixed emotions as this will be my last letter as your Parish Priest.

It comes with a deep sense of gratitude that God called me to be your priest for a season. For your welcome and acceptance of me, your hospitality and your sense of who you are before God.

As I closed my last report to Parish Council:

I commend you to hold on to the incredible ethic which holds this parish together, particularly of ***endeavouring to be an expression of God's love in the community.***

Your work ethic and generosity are something to be proud of, but please, continue in your "can do" attitude and humble generosity.

I love the way you work together in such a positive way. Yes, we don't always agree with each other, but we are respectful and work together for God's purposes ... and not our own.

May God continue to bless you, and I pray for the next incumbent to appreciate you and help you to grow further into God's purposes.

It has really been a joy to be here, so much so that, as you know, Chris and I bought and built our 'forever' home here on the outskirts of Denmark, and although I will be "in exile" for six months, I look forward to hopefully worshipping with you again in the second half of the year.

This comes with my very best wishes to you all for a happy, holy and safe (for those who are travelling) Christmas, and may 2025 be a year that fulfils your hopes and dreams.

Before I get carried away, I better let you know the services for the next couple of weeks:

December 22nd – Advent 4

Denmark: 9.30 am Holy Communion

7.00 pm Evening Prayer – A Blue Christmas

Walpole: 10.00 am Communion by Extension

Tuesday, December 24th - Christmas Eve

Denmark 5.00 pm Children's Nativity

7.00 pm Lessons and Carols

Wednesday, December 25th – Christmas Day

Denmark 9.30 am Holy Communion

Walpole 10.00 am Morning Prayer

Sunday, December 29th – Christmas 1

Denmark 9.30 am Holy Communion – my last service

Walpole 10.00 am Morning Prayer

While negotiations for the interregnum are still ongoing, it looks like it will be a combination of Revd Sue Lodge-Calvert and Dr Alison Kershaw in Denmark, with Revd Sue going to Walpole one Sunday per month, to back up Harold Luxton. No doubt you will receive a letter from the Wardens / Parish Council, once details have been finalised. Rest assured, you will not be left without liturgical and priestly leadership.

I ask for your prayers for the parish leadership team during the interregnum:

- the Wardens, who are also the parish Nominators, Tine Adams, Harold Luxton and Tom Sheard;
- Revd Sue Lodge-Calvert, Alison Kershaw, Harold Luxton and the supporting team of Licenced Lay Ministers: Sally Prickett, Jan Pattinson, Jane James and Tom Sheard;
- Parish Council, the makeup of which will change following the Annual Meeting of Parishioners on Sunday February 23rd, but currently is made up of the Wardens (as above), Treasurer Harold Luxton, Secretary Marion Jamison, with Bev Dixon, Jan Hill, Jane James, Alison Kershaw and Jan Pattinson.

I also ask you to seriously pray that our next incumbent would hear God's calling to apply for the position.

I will be attaching with this letter a Parish Prayer Diary for 2025, much along the lines of the one I have included for the last four years.

Still on the subject of prayer, the Parish Prayer Circle will be taken over by Alison Kershaw and for those involved, you will be notified of the change when it happens.

This year we have had a lot to celebrate; the 125th Anniversary of the Consecration of St Leonard's which was celebrated with joy on October 20th, the continued hard work which goes on behind the scenes but continues to produce many blessings in *The Mustard Seed* and the continued growth of faith and faithfulness in the parish as a whole.

I am so grateful to you all.

I would like to remind you that next year the parish will be participating in *Hope25*, an initiative of the Australia wide Anglican Church. The main focus of this will take place between Easter and Pentecost. Our "coordinators" in each centre are Harold Luxton in Walpole and Marion Jamison in Denmark. If you have any bright ideas for events that you may like to explore, please contact them. One which may get off the ground next year is an occasional Men's Breakfast in Denmark coordinated by Nigel Dixon and Tom Sheard.

My theme this Advent, leading into Christmas has been to ask you all to ponder what for you is the Good News. Each of us has our own unique relationship with God, and so our answers will all be a little different I would imagine. How would you explain to someone why you believe in God, why you possibly come to church when you can?

For me it is God's love, beginning with John 3:16, "That God so loved the world ...", but spirals out from that. The goodness that God saw in creation, Jesus' commandment to love – love God with everything that is in us and to love each other, because that would be how people knew that we were his disciples. I believe in the profound love of God for each and every one of us, whether we acknowledge God, have lost our faith, or just don't know anymore.

My prayer is that God's love would take seed in your heart and would grow into something that profoundly changes your world.

May the peace of God which is beyond our understanding, may the love which the Word of God brought into the world and the companionship of God's living spirit, fill your very being, and may this Christmas, something unexpected happen as you again experience the birth of the Christ-child.

May hope, peace, joy and love be with you ... and *THANK YOU!*

It has been an honour to be your priest and hopefully, your friend.

Sally

Revd Sally Buckley tssf

Parish Priest