

3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm aware that the last few months have been an unsettling time in our churches, with much changing and much still unresolved. My hope and prayer is that this letter will be an encouragement to you.

I will begin, not with specific details of our situation in Sutton, but with some words from St Paul to the Church in Ephesus:

*You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 1, vs 19-22)*

It is most likely that Paul writes from prison, to a church themselves suffering persecution for the sake of the Gospel. His letter is a much-needed reality dose- however testing the circumstances are, it is Christ who holds our churches together as God builds each and every member of the church into a body where he lives by his Spirit. We are no more immune to frustrations and setbacks than anybody else is, but God's work in us is something that can never be ultimately frustrated.

Praise God that it is by his strength, and not our own, that his purpose for the church will come to completion. However trying things may feel, ours is a story that ends well. This is a call to maturity, unity and mutual encouragement- see Ephesians 4:1-6 for a more detailed picture of how we might response to that truth.

On a more specific, 'ground level', I am encouraged by how I have seen all three of our churches continuing their call to be the body of Christ together in these last months; worshipping, praying, studying scripture, gathering around the Lord's table and welcoming the community into our churches.

I am also confident that our Bishops, Christopher and Jonathan, and their staff are committed to securing the best possible outcome for our churches, as well as for Justine. This will involve a review of the shape of our Team

Ministry over the autumn, and I am confident that our Bishops and their staff are committed to ensuring this process- and, in time, finding a new Clergyperson- is as quick as possible.

I am grateful that the Diocese has provided the Revd David Butlin to lead some services at St Nicholas and be available during the week (usually on Tuesdays) to support us for this season. I'm also grateful to David for being with us.

If anyone from our churches would like to discuss matters relating to the Team, or anything else, please do know that David is going to be at St Nicholas Church at 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup> of August- he'd be glad to pour you a cup of tea and hear your thoughts and feelings on the situation, or just get to know you a bit better. Please know as well that I, and the rest of the ministry team, are happy to discuss anything relating to the Team Ministry, as well as any pastoral concerns you have. My contact details are below.

In the meantime, please be assured of my prayers. St Paul prays these words for the Ephesians- with Christ as our cornerstone, please join me in praying this for one another;

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)*

Your brother in Christ,

Phil

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