

***Keeping in touch with God
and each other.***

UPDATE JANUARY 2007

Dear friends,

In the December Update I quoted Deuteronomy 31:6 and referred to that scripture and the Scripture Union notes in my letter of 14th December which I know came as a great shock to many. Here is the scripture again ***“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed”.***

I have been greatly relieved and encouraged to hear how many found that letter helpful in understanding how I believe God had been leading me. Thank you for your prayers and the love all the family have received.

So what next? The New Year brings a reality check. My last Sunday I think will be the 28th January and over the last week the extent of the uprooting has been dawning on me as that day will come too soon. Last Sunday I said I didn't believe that God was going to be on vacation as far as Holy Trinity is concerned when Hennie and I leave. I believe that Joseph in his response to the angelic dream is a good model for the church to be hearing God directly for now, not relying on what has been done in the past or even what we think is best. As far as the process is concerned I am sure that Bishop Colin will explain what is to happen and who will be responsible during the interregnum (as it is called) and who will be able to provide support in different areas of ministry. (please be sure you read his letter, that will be given out this Sunday, 7th January) I know there are many people praying for Holy Trinity and seeking God's face. The responsibility passes from me so you are quite free to ignore all this, but here are my thoughts so far.

First, please support and pray for the churchwardens; they have a great responsibility to oversee this as far as the church is concerned, they are responsible to Bishop Colin and they are his appointed officers. Their task

will not be easy. Fortunately for most of the Sunday and midweek congregations there are good teams leading those congregations and trying (I hope) to put into practice the vision I have been casting these last years (being a transforming community...). This means that in almost every case someone will be praying for you and seeking to encourage you in communion, community and mission (to quote Viv Thomas's summary of a mature Christian fellowship two years ago). But this will obviously be much easier if all the church is praying for all of church, and Viv's teaching on prayer at this year's A wayday should help this happen. May I ask you to consider making the first Monday of the month Prayer Night a particular priority even if you haven't been able to come before now. The small groups and clusters which have been growing so well are also key here in prayer, pastoral support and continuing mission; don't give up the habit of meeting together (remember Hebrews 10:24 and 25).

Second, if you believe God is speaking to you about the future, tell someone, probably a warden but maybe a member of your congregation team; test it, try it out on those who may agree and those who will challenge. One of the phrases I hoped to bring into the church's vocabulary was the concept of "constructive dissent" as opposed to "destructive consent", that is don't go along with stuff and then complain, if you want to disagree say so in love and submit your view to the wisdom of the church and the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Beware any cabals, any muttering, any gossip, anything that you would not say to a person's face. When we had the discussions about the reordering I reiterated that it was not only what we did that mattered but how we did it. That will be put to the test now.

Third on specifics, when I outlined priorities at last years Annual Meeting (I'm sure you could get a copy from the office if you've laid too many coffee cups on your present one!) my first two were a youth minister and reordering. It may still be possible to make an appointment in relation to youth and I am sure Greg Bartlem will give good support and the Archdeacon advise on what could be done in the interim; there is money in the budget. Above all support, pray offer help to the brilliant team who are currently running the children's and youth groups on Sundays. This is really outstanding ministry and those involved need morale boosting from time to time as anyone would. One principle which has begun to emerge is that

someone worshipping in one congregation might offer to serve in a ministry in another.

As far as reordering is concerned, I would not have been at all easy in moving unless I believed the church had reached a point at where there was enough consensus to be able to continue the momentum and not believe it simply had to go back to the drawing board. Of course someone leaving in the middle of such a project is not ideal. The Doom is not at all an exact parallel but I was able to pick up where David and the church had got to and bring the project to completion (not that anything to do with church buildings is ever complete). Similarly the PCC Awayday in June was a marvellous example of how to do this and if you look at the notes of that meeting you will see how much consensus has emerged. This means I think that the excellent working group, with Sue Wilcox and Bill Johnson leading are in a strong position to work on areas the PCC didn't address, and keep the exploration going. No one can take decisions without the PCC under Bishop Colin's oversight following all the procedures that we have been following and know we cannot but follow. Beware conspiracy theories, please go on putting into practise the courtesy and respect that has marked the process to date and the Lord will lead and protect and take the church to a place maybe before a new incumbent comes in which you can say to such a person "this is where we believe God is leading us. Come over and help us".

In all the areas of life in the church, small groups, clusters, prayer ministry, Alpha, Meeting Place, music, welcome, administration now is the time to see whether you might offer yourself to help, "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). Holy Trinity is a church gifted by God and called to bless this city. Christmas was a wonderful example of how this happens; I am asking to see whether the imagined increased attendances across the season was down to the prayer witness and seriousness of our desire to call the city to worship Christ. Thank you to everyone who gave and gave again so that everything from Christingle to Crib to Carol services and Communion at Midnight and at other times, as well as everything else, could happen.

The sudden death of dear Betty Burgess just before Christmas and her funeral on the day I write this letter are a sobering reminder that this community of which we are a part, whether here or Birkenhead or Dorridge, is a community with an eternal perspective under the auspices of our Lord who has overcome death and intends the world to know this good news through us. There were

some extraordinary God-instances, even in Betty's passing, enormous encouragements that God is with us.

Back to Joseph and Deuteronomy; the Lord is more willing to speak than we know; his promise is true; that was Joseph's and Mary's discovery, let it go on being your's and mine as well in this new year,

With love in Christ

Keith