

The Parish of Christchurch



*The Priory Church of the Holy Trinity, Christchurch
St George, Jumpers • St John at Purewell*

For February 7th, 2021

Dear Friends,

Many of the recurring questions I have been hearing for a while focus, understandably, on how – and when! – we might come out on the other side of Covid-19. The ‘when?’ question is unanswerable, so many and complex are the factors involved; we cannot influence them, nor do they give us any potential for choice (other than to choose to go on abiding by the regulations and guidance and, when invited, to be vaccinated).

The ‘how?’ question is very different. Not only is it much less speculative; it also gives us the freedom to make choices as to the way ahead. Which is why now, even as the current lockdown continues, is the right time to consider how we would like things to be at the other end of the pandemic. As Maya Angelou once wrote, “You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.” We have a choice.

With this in mind, I am producing a Lent Course based on the recent book published by Pope Francis, with Austen Ivereigh, entitled *Let Us Dream: The Path To A Better Future* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). This short book was written early in the pandemic, at a time when Francis was, like the rest of us, fundamentally in lockdown and unable to interact with people as he normally would. This led him to reflect deeply on what was happening, on what it might mean, and – just like our questions – how we might emerge from the pandemic.

The message of this book is prophetic and timely. *Let Us Dream* is a book for now, not next year. Lent 2020 is the ideal time to consider what it has to say and how we might respond. As Pope Francis writes: “To come out of this crisis better, we have to see clearly, choose well and act right. Let’s talk about how. Let us dare to dream.”

As on our previous Lent Courses, this “Let Us Dream” will have five sessions. Each will feature extracts from the book, together with a passage of scripture to help us think about on one of the key themes. There will also be questions for reflection and discussion and an opportunity to pray.

Because we are unable to meet in person, the course will be held via Zoom, with which so many of us have become familiar in the past year. The sessions will be on Mondays at 2.30pm, and Wednesdays at 2.30pm and 7.30pm.

If you would like to join the Lent Course, please send an email to conference@christchurchpriory.org or use the email contact form on the website. Please indicate which of the days/times you would prefer. We will then give you details of how to join the Zoom call for each session and send you the course booklet. If you are unable to use Zoom, the best suggestion I can make is to get the book: it’s an inspiring read.

One of the admirable things about “Let Us Dream” is that Francis doesn’t prescribe a list of things we should do: rather, he points the way to how ordinary people like us, acting in harmony despite our differences, can discover new possibilities that we had not seen before. As you are able, I invite you to join this voyage of discovery through our Lent Course, and the book on which it is based.

In the meantime, please continue to pray for God’s guidance, grace and sustaining power, all of which we need in the coming days and weeks.

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Chief Operations Administrator

Another manifestation of our desire to emerge from the pandemic in a better place is the new post in our parish administration which was advertised at the beginning of this week. This follows extensive discussions which began before the first lockdown, leading to a decision by the PCC at the beginning of January. Working on the principle that not everyone reads the PCC minutes, I thought it might be helpful to give you the background and the reasons behind this:

1. The parish's Administration and Finance staffing is not sufficient to sustain what we are already doing. This is no criticism of the individuals concerned, but has everything to do with the work overload that lands routinely on their desks. We are not creating a healthy and sustainable working environment for our staff. As things stand, we are currently not an exemplary employer.
2. Our capacity to recover from the impact of the pandemic requires us to increase income through multiple means, including stewardship, commercial enterprise, income from visitors and legacies.
3. The parish's agenda over the next five-ten years will include – if we are permitted – the construction of a new building, fulfilling multiple functions including that of providing a new hall as a focus for supporting the community and augmenting income. There are also a number of other important projects, most of which have been on the agenda for years, which are necessary in enabling the Priory to play its role in our mission and ministry in the coming decade.

Running through all three points is an unavoidable truth: our capacity to increase income and take forward these important projects is hampered by our existing administrative and financial staffing levels and structure, which are inadequate both for our current ministry and for anticipated growth in the next decade.

This is what lies behind the PCC decision to create two roles: Chief Operations Administrator (COA) and Finance Administrator. The latter will be filled by Ian Penny, who will move sideways from his existing role as Parish Administrator to this purely financial post. We hope to interview for the new COA next month.

The PCC has agreed to fund the new post from our reserves for the first two years. Thereafter, this salary should be funded out of increased income, made possible in part by the new staffing provision. In the business case for these proposals prepared by Julie Mills, who chairs the Finance Committee, she confirms that if we want to recover well from the impact of Covid-19, in terms of income, welcome to visitors and provision of a good visitor experience, renewal of our mission to the congregations, support of the wider community, and (not least) administrative effectiveness, then it is right that we implement these proposals now.

If any of you would like to discuss this with me, please do get in touch. Please pray that we find the right candidate to fill this important new post, which is so vital in helping us emerge well from the pandemic.

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Heidi Haagenen

As you know, Heidi Haagenen will be leaving us on February 14, to go on to her new post at St Michael's, Bournemouth. To make a contribution to her leaving gift, please give by one of the following means:

- **by bank transfer**, please use: Account Name - P.C.C. of Christchurch No.2 Account; Sort Code 52-21-34; Account Number 52428001.
- Please use "Heidi" as the reference and email Ian Penny on prioryhouse@christchurchpriory.org,
- **by cheque**: please make cheques payable to P.C.C of Christchurch No.2. Account and mark for Ian's attention. If posted, to Priory House, Quay Road, BH23 1BU. Whether by post or by hand, please clearly mark "Heidi" on or in the envelope.
- **by cash**: please put in an envelope for Ian and bring to the Priory, clearly marked as above.

Thank you. Please pray for Heidi, Haaken and their family as Heidi prepares for her new post. This week the PCC approved the recruitment of her successor. Thanks to a generous, unsolicited donation, we already have the funding for this post for nearly the first two years.

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Parish Benevolent Fund

In recent weeks we have all become aware of the pressures on schools, their students and their families because of the lockdown and the necessity of online learning. This has caused particular difficulties for disadvantaged families.

While the government's provision of laptops to schools has gone a considerable way to meet this urgent need, it became clear a couple of weeks ago that this didn't provide sufficient support for disadvantaged families with multiple children. Following conversations with several schools in our locality, it became clear that a number of families in Somerford Primary School were in that predicament.

Accordingly, as Somerford Primary is in the area covered by the Parish Benevolent Fund, the wardens and I authorised the purchase of ten laptops for use by the school. These have already been deployed to families whose children will benefit from them during lockdown; thereafter, the school will be able to use them to support children's education in other ways.

There is always a tension in church circles in imparting information like this, not least because Jesus himself said some pretty trenchant things about not making a song and dance, nor letting our right hand know what our left hand is doing. when we "give alms".

The reason I am mentioning this now, therefore, is not to fish for compliments, credit or praise, but because the PCC thought that this latest example of what the Parish Benevolent Fund should be shared within the parish community. Individually, personally, we are all able to give generously. Through the Benevolent Fund we, together, can do even more to give help and hope to some of our neighbours.

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Next Thursday sees the Licensing of the Revd Jonathan Evans in Bruton parish church, in a service that is happening on Zoom. I learned this week that, because of the necessary limitations on numbers, it will not be possible for members of Christchurch parish to participate in that. The good news, however, is that the service is being recorded. We shall be receiving a link (hopefully) next Friday, which we will share with you in the next pastoral letter. Please pray for Jonathan and Alice in the run up to Thursday's Licensing.

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The theme running just beneath the surface of everything in this letter is faith, the kind of faith that trusts in God as a loving and generous heavenly Father, who guides and provides for his people. The classic New Testament verse that speaks to this is Hebrews 11.1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Of this verse F. F. Bruce writes:

"In Old Testament times ... there were many men and women who had nothing but the promises of God to rest upon, without any visible evidence that these promises would ever be fulfilled; yet so much did these promises mean to them that they regulated the whole course of their lives in their light. The promises related to a state of affairs belonging to the future; but these people acted as if that state of affairs were already present, so convinced were they that God could and would fulfil what he had promised. In other words, they were men and women of faith. Their faith consisted simply in taking God at His word and directing their lives accordingly ..."

May God give us grace to be people of such faith, that although we may not always see the way ahead, nevertheless, personally and together, we may trust God for today, tomorrow, and every step thereafter,

With every blessing,

