

# The Parish of Christchurch



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

*for Sunday 6 June, 2021*

Dear Friends,

In the late 1960s my school form master was Dr Walter Baston. Every morning began with form assembly during which, virtually without exception, 'Wally B' would ask the form captain, "What's the state of the nation?" To which he would answer, "All present", or give the names of anyone absent.

Some years later, I discovered that once a year the President of the United States gives the "State of the Union" address to Congress and to the American people. This goes back to Article II, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution, which says: 'He shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.' In practice, this normally means that the President will outline the administration's accomplishments during the previous year, as set out something of the programme for the year to come, in intensely political – and often partisan – language.

In a parish context, the Annual Meetings might be the closest equivalent to the "State of the Union". The Annual Report mentions what has happened and the section titled "Future Plans" tries to set out some of the agenda for the coming year. As you may know, I was not able to be present at the APCM this year – my knee is improving slowly, by the way; and many thanks for your prayers and good wishes – and I should like to express my heartfelt thanks to Fr Richard, the churchwardens, and to Sue Haxby for all they did that morning at very short notice to cover for my unforeseen absence.

Nevertheless, as we embark on that part of the Church's calendar known as Ordinary Time, our minds, hearts and souls enriched by our journey through the seasons from Advent to Pentecost, and with the promise of the love and inspiration that flows from the Trinity fresh in our ears, this is a good time to recognise what has been done, despite all the difficulties and obstacles, to be grateful for what has been possible, and to look to the future.

We should mention the fact that worship has been offered online every Sunday since the beginning of first lockdown. The Priory 10.00am service is now being streamed live, with a recorded version on the website, on YouTube and on Instagram later in the day. For this we owe a debt of gratitude to Pat Stewart. During the week, online Morning Prayer continues to be a tremendous encouragement. This worshipping community, of anything from 25 up to 37 people every day, has been one of God's great gifts to us over the past 15 months. And I know that the weekly pastoral letter has been highly valued by so many of you.

In the past year Phase 5B of the Priory conservation has been successfully completed; we are grateful for the grant from the Culture Recovery Fund that helped make this possible. We have appointed Stephen Noble as our new Chief Operations Administrator, and Ian Penny has become our Finance Administrator. Our first attempt to find a new Children and Families Minister proved unsuccessful; we shall try again.

During the months of the pandemic, the parish finances – like those of every church and cathedral, and so many businesses – have taken a serious hit. Much of this is because of the loss of visitor income, and though our planned giving has held up better than anticipated (thank you!), nevertheless it, too, has fallen. Now that the Priory is open to visits once again, the income from visitor donations has already begun to return.

For myself, and for many who were part of our Lent Course, sustained inspiration has come from "Let us dream", written by Pope Francis. This readable book was written from within the pandemic.

The genius of this book is the way Francis looks at what has been happening, what the pandemic might mean for us all – and then look at how we might all emerge from the pandemic. Hence its subtitle: “The Path To A Better Future”. I’ve mentioned “Let us dream” in these letters before. Now I simply commend it to you and suggest you read it.

Rather than retreat (which he acknowledges is always a temptation), Francis encourages Christians everywhere to do the opposite: “This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities—what we value, what we want, what we seek—and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of. What I hear at this moment is similar to what Isaiah hears God saying through him: Come, let us talk this over. Let us dare to dream.”

This book invites us to look to the future, and ask God, “What now? What next?”, looking and listening for signs of God in action, discerning where and how God is at work among us; or, as Francis puts it, “Trusting in Him, we move forward with courage, building unity through discernment, to discover and implement God’s dream for us, and the paths of action ahead.”

As we do so, the core principles of HeartEdge will help our priorities and choices. As unfolded by Sam Wells in his 2019 book, “A future that’s bigger than the past”, the framework of HeartEdge is an ideal fit with our situation: not only does it harmonise with what we have been pursuing as part of the 2015-16 Vision Process, its four main themes – Commerce, Compassion, Culture and Congregation – also tie in with our key priorities for the coming years. Watch this space!

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Next Sunday, June 13, we shall be welcoming Archdeacon Richard Brand who will preside and preach at the 10.00am Eucharist at the Priory. This will be Archdeacon Richard’s first visit to the Priory since his arrival in the diocese. Please keep him in your prayers, as he now has responsibility for providing archidiaconal cover for the entire diocese.

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Many thanks to Fr Richard, the Churchwardens and to those who worked with them to make the drop-in morning coffees and afternoon teas in the marquee such a success over the last two weeks. I know from what a number of you have said that it has been much appreciated.

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So what is the ‘State of this Parish’? What I have written above is only part of the answer. Drawing responses from you all would provide another part. Above all, we need to know what God thinks, as we seek to discern His plans for us here and how the Spirit might be looking to help us become more recognisably a community who “embody a liberating story of reconciliation and grace” (Sam Wells).

As we seek to do that, may we hold in our minds and hearts those well-known words of Jesus in John 10.10: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”. May we not only experience this abundant life for ourselves, but always ask how we can share that abundance with those around us.

With every blessing,

