

St Andrew's Church APCM 7th April 2019

Priest-in-charge's report

Almost seventeen months ago I was licensed as interim priest-in-charge for the parishes of Kildwick, and Cononley with Bradley. I was appointed with five specific objectives alongside the normal business of being a vicar, and so in this report I'm going to highlight some of what's happened in relation to each of these objectives in the life of this church.

The first objective was to establish a coherent, attractive and workable pattern of worship across the three villages. As you are all well aware, a new service pattern came into effect after Easter last year, which was reviewed towards the end of summer; as a result of the review, the pattern was tweaked slightly and is in operation now with a further review at the end of this year. Coming up with a workable service pattern based around the availability of one stipendiary priest was challenging, and I know that it has been hard for a lot of people to adapt to the changes. Whilst not perfect, the pattern that we have currently is workable; though for Kildwick it is still not particularly coherent, with services at two different times on three Sundays each month. And there is still work to be done around the attractiveness of services, particularly if the measure of that is that they are actually attracting more people! More on this later.

The second objective was to develop, agree and implement a pastoral scheme for the future of the two parishes. This is about establishing the new legal relationship between the parishes - whether they become a joint benefice, remaining as two parishes with separate governance, or instead become a single parish, with one PCC supported by local church councils. The members of all the current church councils were invited to a joint away day in October where the Archdeacon came and spoke about the options, and both then and in subsequent meetings the majority supported exploring the option of becoming a single parish. The draft legal scheme to enable this has recently been approved by both Kildwick and Cononley with Bradley PCCs. Having spoken to the Archdeacon this week, I understand that the processes to bring this to completion should be finished in the next few months, so that a new single legal parish is likely to come into existence over the Summer. As we prepare for this, we will continue to explore what it means to be a single parish, and what difference it will make - and I'll come back to that a little later.

Which is where the third objective comes in - which is about developing and starting to implement a sustainable strategy for new ministry and styles of worship to reach out to children, young people and families. It's a cliché, but true, that the church is always one generation from disappearing - because if children and young people don't learn the faith and embrace it for themselves, that's what'll happen. If we, the current members of the body of Christ simply

adopt the attitude of 'it'll see me out' rather than having both **a desire** to see the people after us coming to faith and embracing the adventure of life as a friend and follower of Jesus, and **a willingness** to do what is necessary to enable that, then we simply won't be here in 10 or 20 years' time. In Kildwick, we are blessed with a strong relationship with the primary school that has been in place for many years. We are fortunate to have in this congregation Geraldine Sands, recently appointed as Chair of Governors, alongside her fellow foundation governors Kath Morris and Christine Anderton, who give a lot of their time and energy to supporting the school. Are there others here who volunteer in school regularly? If so, thank you for all that you do. Our CHUFFs group for pre-schoolers and carers goes from strength to strength under the leadership of Lesley, supported by Peter, Libba and Kim. And of course the MiniRingers are flourishing, with a waiting list, and some of them moving to join the senior Ringers. Each half-term, the school comes into church for a collective worship, to which many parents and carers also come, and the school's Christmas services and productions that take place in church are amongst the largest events that take place each year in church. We also have the joy of welcoming families to church for baptism. We are therefore blessed with many opportunities and points of contact where we meet children and families. The challenge that we face is in how we nurture these children and families in the journey of discipleship and draw them into the fellowship of the church. There is something about what we're doing at present that means we're failing in this. Whether it's the day, time or nature of our services, we're currently not succeeding in sharing the good news about Jesus in a way that draws people into becoming part of the body of Christ in Kildwick. If we want to see the church to continue to be here to witness to Christ, we need to look hard at what we are currently doing, and be open to new initiatives.

My fourth objective is about evaluating the needs, opportunities and challenges of the 3 church buildings in furthering mission - and we're all well aware of the challenges that we face as custodians of a 700 year old Grade 1 listed building. I am very pleased that the diocesan Buildings for Mission Officer, Sue Booth, has agreed to form and lead a working group to do some work over the next 6 to 12 months looking at whether and how it is possible to come up with a plan for a sustainable future for this building. It's great that a number of you have already offered to be part of this working group. It's also clear that any such plan will need the active support of people from the local community who are not currently church members, because this church building belongs to the whole parish, not just those of us who meet here Sunday by Sunday. That means that we need to be communicating with them actively, letting them know about the challenges, finding out how much they value this building, and looking at ways in which they can become involved in ensuring its survival, if that's what they want to see.

My fifth and final objective is to help the parishes to develop and articulate their identity in a new and developing relationship with each other. This goes back to that earlier question - what does it mean to become a single parish? What does that look like, for 3 churches across at least 4 communities - Bradley, Cononley, Kildwick and Crosshills? Well, what it's not about is losing the identity of each of the churches. It **IS** about developing closer relationships between the three churches, whilst continuing to worship and witness in each of the villages and communities we belong to. We are the church in the places where God has put us, where we live and shop and have friends - in Bradley, Cononley, Kildwick and Crosshills. But it is quite possible - indeed, biblical - to have both a local perspective, and one with wider horizons. It starts with prayer and worship - and we have opportunities to pray together, at least once a month at the KCB prayer gathering, and to worship together on the 4 5th Sundays of the year (even though this year we're going to miss one opportunity because of Mothering Sunday). It has to involve getting to know each other as people. We've done a little of that, through a parish boundary walk, two joint church councils away days, and a social gathering at Christmas - but there's certainly more to develop here. And being part of a larger grouping is also about identifying those areas of ministry and mission where we can take advantage of being part of something bigger; where we can share ideas and resources, rather than reinvent the wheel - for example, the children's works that we do, or developing services to appeal to families.

This report so far has been fairly detailed, and talked about objectives, and so on. I want to close by reminding us of the question that underlies all the rest - why? Why are we doing all this? What's its purpose?

At its heart, this is a question about what the church is for. We, the church, are here as those who have received the good news of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, and who as a result are called to follow in his way, to become more like him, and to witness in our turn to that good news. The church is called to exist not for itself, but for the sake of the world - to see God's kingdom grow on earth as it is in heaven. There are lots of different ways of doing those things, but at its heart, that is our purpose. Our diocese has as its vision Confident Christians, Growing Churches and Transforming Communities. The process and activities that we're pursuing during this 3 year period are about helping us to achieve these things, in a world of challenges for all of us that include a changing culture with diminishing familiarity with the Christians story, distressingly low numbers of children and young people involved in church life, and fewer full-time clergy. We will find it easier to be confident Christians the more we understand and deepen our faith, and the more we come together with others who share it. We want our churches to grow, because that is what organic things do, and if we're not growing, we're shrinking. But we shouldn't desire growth simply for its own sake, but because it is a sign of more people coming to know God as revealed in Jesus Christ for

themselves, and to find that new dimension to life that comes as one of his followers. If we want to grow, or even want to want to grow, working together to share resources, ideas and good practice is one way to make it more likely to happen. And if we grow, and as we grow, we will find that we are beginning to see transformed communities -communities with stronger connections and relationships, built on kingdom principles of compassion, mercy and love.

It is this vision of the church that I invite you to hold in your hearts and prayers in the year ahead. It is this vision of the church's purpose that I hope and pray will continue to shape our planning and decision making as we journey together. Lent is a time of spiritual pilgrimage through the wilderness, culminating in the way of the cross. It might feel to you this year that you've been in more of a wilderness than usual, as we've navigated bumps and difficulties in this time of change. I pray that we will all continue to trust God and seek his guidance as we continue the journey, remembering what we are for and allowing that vision to shape us. In a fragile and uncertain world, I pray that even as we wrestle with problems and challenges, we will be bearers of light and hope to a world that needs to encounter again and again the good news of God's radical and saving love.

With every blessing

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "With every blessing".

The Reverend Julie Bacon Priest-in-charge