

The Vicarage, Cranham Drive,
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St Barnabas Day 2022

Dear Friends

One of the features of life in Worcester I've appreciated most since we arrived in February 2019 is the close friendship between the churches of our cluster. There are so many ways in which the lives of St Nicholas, St Barnabas and St Wulstans have woven together over the years and these connexions have been a real source of strength and encouragement for us all in the challenges of the last couple of years.

Once Julieann's retirement was announced last year, those bonds have become increasingly significant. For the short-term, the ministry teams have worked collaboratively to ensure continuity of several aspects of the life of St Barnabas, particularly in terms of Sunday worship, weddings, baptisms, funerals and importantly school ministry too. The more complex question has been about what happens next. As all over the country, our diocese is looking very strategically about how to cover ministry posts as vacancies arise. The days of a like-for-like replacement have gone because of the realities of how far-stretched finances have become. Locally, we have been in a long conversation between within the cluster, the deanery and the diocese about what shape ministry might be able to take going forward. This has involved Canon Stephen Edwards and deliberations at a senior diocesan level. Diane Cooksey, the Area Dean, and I are pleased that it has been very clearly heard how we value our life as a cluster and also that we do not want to be in limbo when the opportunities for ministry and mission are all about us.

Taking all of the input into account, a pattern for a next phase has emerged. Phase Two will be an interim period of two to three years, where the cluster, and partners from the wider deanery, focus collaboratively on the life of St Barnabas and its parish. This will involve support from the Diane and one of the new mission companions that the diocese has created, and investments of leadership and creativity from within the parish and from sources beyond --- many of which we have yet to discover. I have accepted the Bishops' invitation to play my part in this by taking on the role of priest-in-charge at St Barnabas, as in interim ministry alongside my responsibilities at St Wulstans. We expect that this will begin formally in July 2022, with a simple licensing at a date yet to be finalised. By the start of the Autumn, we will begin in earnest together looking at what God has for us next.

No-one knows that Phase Three will look like --- because we haven't yet prayerfully together dreamt it into reality! I think we *do* know something of how it will feel though. It will feel as though we are in the parable that Jesus told, when he said, "*a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old*" (Matthew 13:52).

I am well-known for saying that *'none of us is as wise as all of us,'* and I am excited by the opportunity to support St Barnabas and Christ Church in this adventure. For me, an Anglican parish church should have a strong sense of calling and vision of itself within its local community, and be characterised by strong intergenerational relationships and generous inclusive hospitality. Whilst carrying its own flavour, I think a parish church needs to cherish different streams of Christian worship, giving space and permission for these to develop and flourish. This makes enabling and releasing all kinds of ministry gifts such a joy. The longing that I have always brought to parish ministry is that the local church reaches out to God for healing and miracles and provision, and is faithful in calling people to share in the hospitality of God. This means a commitment to training and equipping people to contact, to nurture and to disciple those who they are most likely to encounter. Ultimately, any parish church is a steward of the presence of God amongst his people --- sacred space and common ground. I believe these twin values are the wellsprings for a renewed and ever-deepening wholeness for all who know St Barnabas and Christ Church together as the 'thin' and precious places that they are.

I love this collect that comes at the end of Psalm 132 in the Common Worship Daily Prayer book and invite you all to join with me daily in making this our pilgrim prayer for the journey we are making together:

*Jesus, Son of David,
make us a priestly people;
clothe us in righteousness,
make us fruitful,
and give us hearts to shout for joy
in your salvation;
we pray in the power of the Spirit.*

With my thanks for all that you are doing

Sarah

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