

RECTOR'S COVID LETTER 24.2.21

Dear Friends,

I write to you my last Covid letter as Team Rector of North Wingfield Team Ministry. I retire on Sunday 28th February after 34 years in parish ministry – 6 as a curate and 28 as an incumbent. I believe very strongly in the parish system and have found it a great structure for sharing the good news about Jesus, teaching the Christian faith to all ages and delivering compassion and kindness to those in need.

I will not pretend this ministry has always been easy. There have been considerable ups and downs, but the greatest blessing has been meeting lots of lovely people and seeing many grow in their relationship with God (which is actually the point of the job).

At this point I want to acknowledge the vital part my wife, Linda, has played down the years supporting, loving and praying for me. I really could not have done this job without her. She was a good Lay Reader too!

It is important to remember that a church is not a clergyperson, it is a community of people of all ages who follow Jesus and want to share him with the community around them. Churches always work well when everyone is of one heart and mind and work as a team. I pray you will continue to do this as you discern the way forward, looking for a new Rector and finding out what the Lord wants for you next.

It was my intention to retire before last Christmas around my 65th birthday in December but because of the Covid pandemic I wanted to stay on to help you through a Covid Christmas and through the winter with the hope the pandemic would be nearing an end. At the moment, the end is in sight but there is still a way to go. You are certainly strong enough to get through to the end.

I find 'goodbyes' difficult and believe in what I like to call good 'goodbyes'. Covid makes this difficult to do in person. I have enjoyed a final service with St. Barnabas and St. Barthomew's on ZOOM and St. Mary's and St. John's on 'You Tube'. This coming Sunday I have a final service with St. Lawrence on 'Facebook' livestream at 10am. This will be followed by a ZOOM coffee time at 11am to which all are warmly invited. The access numbers are ID897 897 4694 and the passcode is SL2021.

I am grateful to the churchwardens at St. Lawrence for the possibility of returning for a 'face-to-face' farewell on 24th and 25th July. Details will be available later and you are all warmly invited.

We have all become familiar with the 'Rule of Six' during the pandemic. Could I encourage you with the church 'Rule of Three' for the last part of the pandemic journey and the vacancy?

The 'Rule of Three' is: LOVE GOD, LOVE EACH OTHER AND LOVE THE LOST.

[1] LOVE GOD

When the Lord Jesus was asked, 'Of all the commandments which is the most important?' his answer was simple, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Mark 12:30).

In other words, God wants us to love him with our entire beings. How do we do that? I want to suggest it will involve loving his word (the Bible) and honouring it by reading it and obeying it, daily individual prayer and prayer together as a church, and an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course, I could go into much more detail, but these are a good start.

[2] LOVE EACH OTHER

In John's gospel, we have the remarkable account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. In doing this, he acted out the extent of the love Christian people should have for each other. He then said this, 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another'.

We are, of course, to love all people, Christian believers or not, but Jesus makes it clear there is a special family love between his followers. Sometimes this is hard to do, but it is a command from the lips of Jesus.

[3] LOVE THE LOST

In Matthew's gospel we read this:

'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'.

God loves people. God loves people who do not love him or even acknowledge him. He loves people who are lost and frightened and feel their lives are falling apart. He views them as a harvest to be gathered in. Who will

gather them in? The followers of Jesus. Jesus does not only want us to love each other, he wants us to love the lost as he does. He wants us to have compassion on them and be willing to share the good news about Jesus with them. We do not have to be perfect. We will make mistakes. We may feel tired and weary, but the promise from Jesus is to fill us with the Holy Spirit who gives us power to do these things.

On Sunday 28th February, I will stop being the Team Rector but I will not stop being your friend and brother. May we all go forward together loving God, loving each other and loving the lost.

With much love in Christ,

COLIN COOPER