

Dear Friends

As I write, I am halfway between holidays and therefore just coming up to the middle of August. In a sense then, I am not quite at full throttle and still partially in holiday mode. However, there is a fair bit to get through before departing again and as is so often the case, the magazine letter has to be written. At the moment I feel a bit betwixt and between, but once I'm back at the end of the month I know that reality will really start to bite as a consequence of decisions made earlier this year. From the start I knew that once September came the clock would really be ticking away and I said as much to Emma. Up to now, my leaving has felt to be a long way off, but I am fully aware that now time will really begin to fly! So it is important therefore to set out the things I must say before I leave.

Over the years a lot of people have said to me that it must be lovely working here and in many ways it has been. The Benefice is set in the lovely countryside of Worcestershire and despite the ribbon nature of the main road as it runs through our parishes from top to bottom, affords some lovely views. Top Barn Farm has a lovely view across the surrounding fields and the Laugharne Valley is best viewed from some of the gardens in Parkfield Lane. At Grimley a visit to The Camp will take you to the best place to watch the River Severn flow by and even Henwick Park affords stunning views across the Severn to the North of the City, best seen from the bungalows in Beaconhill Drive.

It is not the setting that I will miss though but the many activities that go on in this place. The schools have naturally been the focus of much of my time in these Communities. I recall attending my first Governors Meeting at Hallow a day or two before I was licensed as Priest in Charge and I engaged with Grimley and Holt School as soon as I could after becoming Vicar of the Benefice. I have always tried to be even handed between the two schools but apart from being the bigger of the two, Hallow is also a Church Aided School, a status which requires greater input from the Vicar. Nevertheless, I have lost count of the number of meetings that I have attended at the two schools. The Governing bodies meet regularly, usually twice a term and on top of that there have been committee meetings where much of the work is done and other interest groups as well. On top of all of that are the regular social events that I have tried to support over the years.

However, my great love has been engaging with the children. Chiefly of course this has been in the many assemblies I have done over the years. I don't know how many children have sat in front of me and shared in the fun over the last 22 years but I reckon it must now be over 1000 and maybe more. The best assemblies have been the ones where I have used gadgets to grab their attention or got the children to act out a bible story that I was teaching them. I have always hated just standing there and talking to the children, much better to have them engaged and involved even if the teachers had to settle them down afterwards so they could be taught.

It is not just assemblies though, there have been times when I have visited classes or met a class in church for pretend baptisms and marriages and other special services. Then there were of course the big church services at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. It has always been lovely on these occasions to see the churches so full of children, staff and parents. It has been a particular joy to lead a number of KS2 School Eucharist's over the past few years, where a special version of the Communion liturgy has been prepared to help children understand what the service means as they are led through step by step. More recently I surprised myself when I was asked to introduce a service at Advent for KS1. The simple service of light that emerged was remarkable and the children's response was brilliant.

Outside of the schools I have tried my best to be involved in the activities of the communities. I have always tried to be involved in the big events, Hallow Country Fair, Sinton Green Fete and Holt Gala. I have tried to respond to any request that has come my way to support local community groups. Over the years I have been in touch with all our Parish Councils for a variety of

reasons and it has been a delight to meet with people when the churches have organised events that the communities have supported. As a naturally shy person this hasn't always been my best suit as Priest here, but I have tried my best. Sometimes it has been much easier to be the hidden person behind the scenes, for example as Incumbent I am Ex-officio Chair of the village charities and I have tried my best to run these efficiently and well.

It was also a great joy to be asked, first by the late Sue Gill, to host at Holt the Civic Service for Malvern Hills District Council when she was Chairman, and later Alwyn Davies made a similar request, this time for the Worcestershire County Council's Civic Service to be at Hallow. I felt greatly honoured and privileged to give a positive answer to both requests.

I am sure there are many things I could have done better, but as I look back over the ways I have engaged with our communities I feel I have done what I can. I trust I have discharged these duties in a way that Father God would approve of. I also hope that it has been received in the same manner by all the people of our parishes. A new Incumbent will be chosen in the not too distant future and I pray that he or she will be a blessing to you all.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert