

## The Renewal of Ministry and Mission to the parishes of Welwyn with Woolmer Green, and Ayot St Peter, as we emerge from COVID19

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*O God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men; that thou wouldest be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations. More especially we pray for the good estate of the Catholick Church; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally we commend to thy fatherly goodness all those, who are any ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate; especially those who have especially suffered during this time of pandemic; that it may please thee to comfort and relieve them, according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ his sake. Amen.*

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Maybe it is old age, but more and more I feel that the prayers of Thomas Cranmer in the Book of Common Prayer, whilst sometimes archaic in their language are eternally contemporary in their eloquence and aptness. They too were written in times of great upheaval and change. So I begin and end with them.

### **Where we are**

For the world, COVID19 has been and continues to be perhaps the most major upheaval we have seen since a world war. Its effects both directly, (in terms of sickness and death), and indirectly, (in terms of counter measures, restrictions, mental health, social fabric, unemployment etc.) have been profound. I

have deliberately avoided here and elsewhere the 'ten things which have changed for ever' approach, because I believe that these will take perhaps a decade to emerge fully. However as at least in this country, we are likely to be able to return to something like normal life fairly soon, it seems appropriate to set out what some of our priorities and challenges might be as churches. Much of what is said here is more applicable to St Mary's Welwyn – you will understand that is necessary, but I would also say that having had more going on, St Mary's is more deeply in need of renewal.

The effects of COVID19 thus far, for us as churches has been again both direct and indirect. We remember those who have suffered and those who have died. We know that for many their mental health, social support and finances have also suffered.

Churches have sometimes been closed, and at no point has worship been 'normal.' Many people with health concerns have stayed away from in person worship, and many have simply not got back into the habit. Many church activities particularly those with children, have been curtailed by the restrictions.



For some, months of isolation and other restrictions have increased their frailty. Others have seen their mental health suffer, or a less clinical sense of melancholy

and inertia has taken hold. Other have simply missed

being part of something and seeing their friends. Sometimes to be honest, nerves and tempers have been frayed.

However some new things have been learnt: 'zoom' and 'livestream' have become much used verbs in the English language, and great efforts have been made locally and nationally to support people and communities. And indeed as we open up again, in some cases we are left with a blank canvas on which to paint to new and perhaps brighter picture in the long term. However we should not underestimate the challenges ahead – which is why I start with *two bits of upbeat news*:

## **Money**

The PCCs might be a bit nervous about me saying this and a recent letter from the Bishop to the parishes has

outlined the sometimes dire financial situation of many parishes, and indeed the church nationally. However whilst I would urge people to continue to think about giving, (and we continue to implement new ways of giving), we have broken even or better, have reserves, and have paid our parish share in full. Therefore I would suggest there are other priorities for the coming year, and constant appeals for money can often appear as a mark of desperation and lack of vision. So – we'll not talk about money for a year, save charitable causes beyond the church's doors.

## **Curate**

As a team we were disappointed not to be allocated a curate for this 2021, and I have been quite open about this. However, we now have the wonderful news that in 2022 the Welwyn Team will be receiving two! They are a married couple, Christie and Ryan Gilfeather. Christie will be based in Welwyn and Woolmer Green, but will minister across the



Team. Ryan, who will be self-supporting (ie not paid) will mainly minister in Codicote. They will live in St Michael's House in Woolmer Green. They are currently both studying at Ridley Hall Cambridge, and will begin their ministry here after their ordination as deacons on Saturday July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022- a date for your diary.

## Returning

It is of course all too easy to assume that to 'return to normality' is an easy thing, which all will welcome. But after a profound period of change, we recognise that things are more complex than that. Even when it is safe to do so, people have gotten out of the habit, or perhaps feel nervous or unsure in some general way. The ministry team are here to support any who would like to talk about this, who perhaps feel nervous or unsure about all sorts of aspects of life as we emerge from the pandemic restrictions – please do not be afraid to get in touch, this is entirely understandable.

Also whilst legal restrictions may have been removed, we will still keep some of our safety features in place in order to protect the vulnerable.

## Prayer

It is almost customary to start a communication like this with the caveat that all of this must



be supported by prayer, and rather leave it at that.

Of course, people will pray in various ways over the coming



would be great – let us know, we'll put the number of such commitments on our website. This simple service also includes bible readings from the Old and New

year and years, but for this particular period it would be worth pointing out:

*The Welwyn team has a daily round of prayer in its churches which any are welcome to join. (Mon: Tewin 5pm, Tue: Codicote 8.30am, Wed: 9am, Welwyn, Thurs: 5pm Datchworth, Fri 9.30am: Woolmer Green, Sat 9am: Welwyn)*

*We understand that many cannot attend in person but would like to feel that they are praying with us in their daily lives – therefore we are promoting the use of the Church of England Daily Prayer app. You can even listen to it at home or in the car - [Daily worship](#) If you were able to commit to this at least once a day for a year that*

*Testaments.*

Also on the website for those who find in person attendance during the week difficult, we will begin a virtual prayer board.

## **Sunday worship**

I know that there are many pressures in modern life. However for the majority, belonging to a Christian church will mean regular attendance at Sunday morning worship. I know all the caveats, but I also think that like it or not, that is where connections are made. So often I have heard said over the past 18 months that the church is not a building – certainly not! **but it is an *ekklesia* – an assembly of people.** Therefore when the

time is *right* ***I do encourage you to join Sunday morning worship regularly – 9.30 at Welwyn, 11.15 at Ayot St Peter and Woolmer Green.***

Along with that goes the need to look at how we worship. Ayot St Peter renewed its service provision just before the pandemic, and Welwyn and Woolmer Green probably need to follow. I think for instance we need a more accessible booklet, simplicity, more working with junior church, a music group and more contemporary music, more of Welwyn Tune. We don't always or ever have refreshments after 11.15 services, and I know that tea and coffee can strangely be a bit of a faff – controversially I wondered if I turned up with sherry or wine for 11.15s, whether congregations at Woolmer Green and Ayot would agree to drink it?

We are not alone in struggling to attract people to **Sunday evening worship**. Ironically in Cathedrals often Choral Evensong is the most popular form of outreach. On the occasions it's at Welwyn I have two suggestions: either we have a come and sing choral evensong where the

choir is anyone from the team who fancies it, or we take a road trip to the Cathedral – either way I think we make a bit of an event of it and those who wish, have supper at the Wellington or elsewhere afterwards.

### **Livestreaming, on line presence and home communions**

It is true that people have got used to participating with things on-line far more in the past 18 months and that includes our live streamed worship for which people have been grateful. However as we have returned to in person worship numbers have fallen sharply.

I do think that we need to look at our social media and communications holistically and a working party will be doing so. Sometimes worship, special events, sermons, will be livestreamed, as well as this being offered for those coming for weddings and funerals. However I, and my colleagues at other team churches, are not convinced that permanently regularly livestreaming Sunday morning worship is desirable. Experience has shown that the

factor determining whether people participate on line or in person is not frailty or health, but familiarity with technology.

To put it bluntly I don't think that one can be a purely 'virtual' member of a church community. I think it can act as a 'top up' for busy people, a tool for communication, a shop front, but not as a replacement for gathered worship. I know some will disagree, but also experience shows that once on line, worshippers realise they can go anywhere in the world – mega churches, the BBC, St Paul Cathedral, St Peter's in Rome, HTB, etc.. we can't compete with those, we can only serve those who are local to us.

It is commonly said that on line worship reaches those who are housebound, and that is certainly true and may be part of the answer. Though asking around, frequently the elderly and housebound are the least engaged with technology. So the main focus for the housebound is still in person – the ministry team taking communion to them in their homes. This has substantially increased as we

have emerged from restrictions, but I would urge those who for health reasons cannot attend church in the medium or long term, should contact me so that we can arrange for the church's worship to be brought to them.

## **Children and Youth**

It is quite clear and indeed understandable that our work with children has been most disrupted by the past 18 months. Before COVID19 these were our main activities:

- Junior Church during the Sunday 9.30 Parish Eucharist
- CraTea after school club on Mondays at 3.30
- 'Pray and Praise' parents and tots on Wednesdays at 2pm,
- St Michael's After School Club on Wednesdays at 3.15
- Welwyn Tune Junior Choir on Friday at 6.15pm

Most of these either have already started up again, or can and will start up again in September (perhaps St

Michael's may have to wait for a new curate), but I would like us to think about the following.

Firstly, Sarah-Jane Hingorani after leading CraTea excellently now has weekday family and professional commitments which means we need new

leadership. And Nikki Wren who again has run the rota for Junior Church, with family commitments wishes to pass this on.

However perhaps more ambitiously – I wonder whether those activities which are not weekly are therefore slightly haphazard. This applies mainly to CraTea and 'Pray and Praise' – my own opinion is that we ought to at least explore running these weekly.

### **Weekly Activities**

The above leads us on to think about a cohesive weekly day-to-day programme of activities particularly at St Mary's



Welwyn which might form the mainstay of our 'offer' to the parish, for publicity and promotion.

- Sunday worship
- Monday CraTea
- Tuesday Community Café
- Wednesday Breakfast Bible Study, Eucharist, Play and Praise.
- Friday Welwyn Tune and Adult choir rehearsals
- Saturday morning Fairtrade and Morning Coffee

### **Other activities**

There are of course many other worthwhile activities

which will need to rediscover and promote themselves, mostly happening monthly –

Walking, theatre, and book groups; bell ringers; servers; mothers' union; church fellowship; community lunch; holiday club; summer evensongs.

## Study

It is also important that we are a learning community which seeks to know more about God's purposes, particularly in the Bible. It is for this reason also that we are proud and supportive of our church schools. We are very grateful for Gay and Michael Carpenter for running their wonderful Bible Discovery courses. Every Wednesday morning we look at our Sunday bible readings. We could probably do more to promote learning opportunities beyond the team boundaries – for instance the courses at St Albans Cathedral Study Centre.



Also in the autumn on Sunday evenings we will have a course called '10 questions, a drink and a pudding' – yet to be devised this will be very open course designed to allow people - atheist, curious, Christian (new or life long) – to explore some of the Big Questions. It will lead into Confirmation on Advent Sunday with the Bishop of Hertford, for those who desire it – but that is not in any way to limit it, all are welcome.

**Volunteers – we all need more, sign up sheet, training,**

It's always asked innocently I understand, but one of the things I dread is being asked 'if you could just find a few



volunteers .....’ We need to remember that nearly everything in our church communities is done by volunteers, very few are paid. In fact technically clergy are paid a stipend – a living allowance, to free us for ministry – rather than a wage for a job done. It is therefore amazing what we do as church communities, and people give sacrificially of their time and talents, in addition to what they give financially. In that respect there are few passengers, and very often despite perhaps other concerns, families and

professional needs, ill health, etc. people keep on giving. Most activities could therefore do with more volunteers, and it isn’t always easy to find them. We often don’t appreciate the length of the list (see separate sheet) or what others are doing.

So we need to be realistic about how we are going to use people’s time most effectively. We need to encourage and help each other – if Teresa May warned people there is no magic money tree, then I would want to say there is no magic volunteer tree which I can pick fruit from at will.

Having said that if we want to return and perhaps in some cases return stronger, then we are going to have to look to ourselves for the labour. **This is a time for hands to the plough.** Of course, we can look to others (the lists for telling other people what to do and how to do it are sadly all full ...in most walks of life), but at this point perhaps we also need to look at ourselves. And of course, sometimes there is a case that people might have thought of getting involved,

but for one reason or another haven't got around to it. And sometimes people feel a bit nervous about volunteering. *So let's be clear, no group is ever full, and no activity (perhaps apart from preaching!) needs training that can't be provided in house.*

**So attached is a sign up sheet – no commitment involved at this stage, but if you would like to be involved in any church activity please give it a tick, and we will put you in touch. In addition on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October from 11-12.30 we will have a drop in morning with sign up and training for church activities at St Mary's Welwyn – please come along.**

### **Care Homes**

One of our Readers, Usha Hull, has for many years exercised a particular ministry to some of the care homes in our parishes. It has been a wonderful gift. However care homes have had a difficult 18 months, and in particular they have not been able to welcome outside visitors. I hope that we might get a few

volunteers together to restart and enhance that often hidden but so valuable ministry, when appropriate.

### **2022 – Retreat and Holiday**

Next year the Team will have both a retreat and a holiday. Hopefully these will be enjoyable chances to get away and enjoy those friendships which circumstances may have been diminished in the past couple of years.

### **PCC support**

Although this is drafted and written in the first person, this comes in consultation with and the approval of the Parochial Church Councils

### **When?**

Obviously we are slightly at the mercy of 'events' and continued restrictions. However if we are to avoid a lack of momentum, it seems sensible to draft out a kind of timetable. It is of course a personal decision as to precisely when people return to in person worship and other activities.

- Most of the restrictions have now been lifted, but we move into the summer holiday period. Also people need time to readjust and to catch up with family and friends.
- I suggest from mid-September everyone should be asking themselves if they haven't already, whether soon they might return to in person worship and events.
- Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October as indicated would be a morning to consider what you might like to be involved within as we emerge from COVID19.
- **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the eve of Welwyn Harvest Festival, I invite you all, and with friends**

**you might like to invite, to a social evening at the Rectory, 2 Ottway Walk, from 8pm.**

- **The following morning at Welwyn in our Harvest Festival – I very much hope a new Director of Music will be starting, and Bishop Michael of Hertford, will be visiting our parishes for two days – he will be leading our worship on that Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October.**

And so to end as I began, with the words of Cranmer.

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*A General Thanksgiving*

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men; particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them. We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.*