

A letter from Fr Paul to the parish of St Andrew's.



A letter from your new Interim Priest in Charge

My name is Fr Paul Blanch, and I am delighted to introduce myself as your new interim Priest in Charge. This is a slightly unusual method of having priestly leadership at St Andrew's for a time limited period, but one that we hope will give focused leadership, liturgical oversight and regular pastoral care to the congregation and wider parish in readiness for the calling of your new parish priest in 2021.

In the initial stages of this interim ministry it is my hope to preside at Sunday Mass at least once a month, and also to offer weekday Masses and other sacramental rites on a regular basis at St Andrew's, thus giving a prayerful focus to the leadership of the Churchwardens and PCC that will be firmly rooted in our worshipping life together.

Obviously, I am still very much Rector of Holy Trinity in Ramsgate, so I am splitting my time between both parishes, and this will, I am sure, be a little difficult from time to time, but I believe not insurmountable.

The Diocese of Canterbury has taken real time and effort in setting up this interim ministry for your support and growth, and we have the full support of our Bishop, + Norman, but also The Bishop of Dover and all the senior staff. The support given to us as a Resolution/Society parish from the Diocese has been most encouraging, and under the concept of mutual flourishing as outlined in the **Five Guiding Principles** states "*Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures.*"

I am acutely aware that you have been without a full-time parish priest for a very long time, and therefore you may have come to feel that you are just hanging on rather than flourishing. However, you have been blessed with the generous and joyful ministry of some stalwart retired priests, and I pay tribute to them for their dedication and commitment, and pledge to work collaboratively with them in the months to come.

Above all else, I believe that living the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ can be very challenging, but it can also be tremendous fun. There are too many dull Christians, and so we need to seize this God given opportunity to take stock, re-group and go forward with a deep, lively, and infectious faith to the people of Deal rooted as we are in the fullness of the Catholic and apostolic faith.

So, let me tell you a little about myself.

I was born and raised in North Eastern England in the City of Durham, growing up under the shadow of that city's great Norman Cathedral, the burial place and shrine of both St Cuthbert and the Venerable Bede. Thankfully, my upbringing from birth was in the context of a committed and active Church of England family whose daily life was immersed in the life of our local church and parish. I was one of those fortunate children who was taught to pray at home, but also led by example to worship with my family Sunday by Sunday at the Parish Mass in our village church.

My early years from the age of five were further influenced by attendance at our local Church of England School. Here our parish priest came into school and celebrated Mass with incense and all the ritual he could muster. The spectacle and drama of this liturgy took hold of me immediately, exciting both my heart and my senses, thus also touching my very soul.

I can look back to these days as powerful, profound, and spiritually heady! These spiritually developing years would coincide with my adolescent development, and as I matured, so my faith moved forward in leaps and bounds.

At sixteen, I had volunteered for active service with the Church Army through their exciting young people's scheme of Christian service. This experience took me to work in their social care department caring for the elderly over a period of one year. This brought together for me the balance of an active faith with "hands on" service, and it is an experience I will never forget.

Throughout my education from High School to University my faith has remained central to me, but not without its development and change. Throughout my academic studies I have found the need to question, to investigate and become more open to the pertinent theological issues of our time, and therefore while my love of scripture is as deep and powerful as

ever, I approach the task of sharing faith with a greater degree of openness. Hence, I am a strong advocate of the Anglican balance of Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

My journey to priesthood came to fruition in my late twenties, and my time at Seminary was a very significant experience. This formed me for parish ministry in what has now been a diverse and exciting thirty-five-year priestly ministry taking me from the UK to the USA and back again. I am married to Maggie, and I can tell you that she supports me in my vocation as a priest in a wonderful and spiritual way, so you will also see Maggie at various events and worship in St Andrew's. We very much come as a team!

If I had a personal mission statement it might read something like this....

“My job is not simply to solve people's problems or even to make them happy, but to help them see and feel the wonderful Grace of God already operating in their lives.”

These words were written by an incredibly wise priest some years ago, and they have become a powerful reminder to me of the real task of a parish priest.

Fr Paul F Blanch