



Grasmoor Mission Community

From Revd Canon Godfrey Butland, Mission Community Leader

28th June 2020

My Dear Friends,

Heartfelt thanks...

...to you all, first for having me and Les come and live among you; and secondly for the very touching greetings at this morning's online service, and the various cards we have received on my retirement. We are so grateful that God brought us here, and whilst it feels a bit strange to be leaving at such a time, we feel sure that God is moving us on again. We will continue to hold you all in our prayers, and look forward to hearing news about how churches are growing, and continuing to bless and serve our town and villages. I am personally thankful for the many ways we have been co-workers for Christ in this area, and how there has been such readiness to explore new ways of 'churching' both in our separate churches, and as a Mission Community.

Two Intentions

When I came to Cockermouth just over 5 years ago, I felt God had given me two intentions: 1) to help each church to become more strongly rooted, and locally led; 2) to raise up two new ordinands, who would be part of local church leadership teams. By God's grace, this has happened – and beyond my expectations! My original intentions concerned only the Cockermouth Area Team (CAT), as it was only later that I became Mission Community (MC) Leader. The four churches of the CAT have indeed become stronger, three of them having formed a leadership or vision team; and I have been privileged to engage with the other eleven churches of the MC, where we have seen wonderful examples of cooperation and emerging vision, particularly through engaging with *Sharing God's Blessing*.

I have observed too how all our churches are seriously thinking and praying about what their church might look like after the immediate effects of the coronavirus pandemic. There is a readiness to pray and think carefully about what is both practical and appropriate in every situation – a realization that we should not just to go back to 'the way we were.' To 'church' differently!

With regard to ordinands, God the Holy Spirit has been very busy! Gill Davidson would have been ordained yesterday, 27th – now postponed to 26th September. Deborah Hoddinott is due to be ordained next year, while Christina Brentnall and Barbara Robinson begin training in September. There are 3 others now actively exploring this vocation. Thanks to all of them! Such locally ordained, self-supporting (i.e. unpaid) clergy were a vital part of a county 'Strategy for Ministry' in 2014. And that's not all!

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We have also seen a number of people considering how God might be calling them in a number of other ways: in church leadership, community involvement, pastoral care, administration, children's and youth ministry, worship-leading – and, of course, in time-honoured roles as Churchwardens and Church Council members. For example, in 2016/17 Ann Peate and I lead a *Worship4Today* course, in which there were over 20 participants.

Disciples and the Pandemic

We live in such extraordinary times. I remember, early in lockdown, thinking about how we should respond. I realised everything is changing, but one thing has not: the call to discipleship, to follow Christ. It remains our biggest challenge, to follow where he leads. Not necessarily to do what others are doing, not to act out of guilt or a sense of duty, but to discern what is the 'yoke' Christ has laid on our shoulders, the 'burden' we must bear. (*See Matthew 11.28-30*) This is actually a lifetime's work, so do not be anxious if you cannot be sure what is his purpose for you at any given time. Just be faithful. In the 19th century, Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote:

God has created me to do for him some definite service. He has committed some work to me, which he has not committed to another. I have my mission – I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught, I shall do good. I shall do his work...Therefore I will trust him.

There are undoubtedly tough times ahead. In the words of Pope Francis, the Church needs to 'go underground', to serve the needs of the poor, the ones most disadvantaged by the inevitable economic downturn. We also need not to sit in judgement on those who seem to disregard 'the things that make for peace', while the pandemic still rages. Remember how Jesus looked at the crowds, and saw them as 'sheep without a shepherd.' Maybe shepherding will be a good model for churching as we bless our neighbourhoods in future?

And finally...

I have long believed that Christians need to 'put last things first' – that is to say, remember where creation, is heading by God's good providence. We are not doomed for destruction, but for healing and restoration when heaven is 'earthed' at the end of all things. (*See Revelation 21.1-4.*) There is nothing new about a pandemic! This is just further evidence of a creation which is broken and dis-eased. It is not for us to fix it – but it is our calling to work with God for the good of the whole world (*See Romans 8.28 – and Tom Wright's book, 'God and the Pandemic.'*). May we be 'humble missionaries' to our neighbours, our town and villages, *declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his own marvellous light!* (*1 Peter 2.9*).

God bless you all. And thank you once again.

With love, prayers, and best wishes from me and Les,

Godfrey