

LAST AFTER TRINITY

Can I begin by offering my condolences to those of our Parish Family affected by the floods last week in Great Bealings particularly? The aptly named 'Lower Street' became a raging river and our PCC Secretary and Treasurer (who live next door to each other) are dealing with serious damage to their homes, and both of them were forced to move out and find friends to put them up, and still they cannot return for some time.

Bishop Mike made it to this week's 'Church Times' with a picture of his living room under water, so that should give the clergy a little respite while he sorts things, but I doubt it! There is a day conference on Wednesday at the Cathedral about Primary School RE and Inspections around that theme – and Bishop Mike is due to chair some of it! I am going with the Deputy Head of St Mary's Primary. I am afraid I am not one of those clergy who believe that our children are the 'future' of the church but instead, part of the present... potentially, if only we could all make that commitment clearer.

Little practical ways like the coffee stall some of you help with at St Mary's playground on Monday mornings, going in to help with children's reading, helping with an after-school club, coming along to the services when they come to Church here, making more family-friendly provision here on Sundays with teams of helpers so that it isn't just left to the same one or two people....these are just a few positive stepping stones

some of us are already offering and wanting to promote even more. Building bridges of trust in small practical ways and making clearer links between our Churches and Schools has to be a life-enhancing thing, a shared thing, because we all learn from one another and, I believe, depend upon one another.

As a Governor, I see all the strains and pressures which so many staff and parents are under but with my Rector's hat on, I also see the openings and opportunities there for support, encouragement, greater participation, and yes, our worship patterns will need to change and adapt again, to make young families feel more 'at home'. But I say these things with the caveat of St Paul's last line in today's first reading to the Thessalonians:

"So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us."

That very personal statement of intent lies at the heart of our shared Christian calling to love, follow and serve our Lord, and it will always be a challenging vocation to apply – how do we share the Gospel more, how do we open up our interior selves more, like little children?

On what is traditionally, 'Bible Sunday', you need no reminder from me what Jesus said not only about our acceptance of children, but also that gift of being child-like as adults. We will all have different views on that one, I feel sure, but for me it would be those natural gifts of wonder, imagination,

humour, acceptance of difference, our naivety, vulnerability, as well as our hidden depths, our natural joy of enquiry and for learning, and sometimes, our brutal honesty. Just last week, one of my godchildren's latest obsession is to go around wearing sunglasses (shades) all day long. I made the mistake of asking why, and she said very matter of fact: "because it's cool!"

Please do take away one of these 'What's on' sheets for families of every shape or age or size – the great thing about being part of a local Christian family is that everyone and every age group, whether single, married, divorced, bereaved whichever applies, we belong together as ONE in Christ Jesus.

For All Saints' Sunday next week, it says there's going to be a brunch afterwards. But it will need lots of different helping 'hands' to make that happen – as next Friday's bonfire party will, in Great Bealings. If anyone has some spare dry wood, for example, please let us know!

When we can, and do, help out willingly and lovingly, we lighten other's burdens, share the load – and the results can and will be: transformative, cheerful, and hopeful. I think that's what St Paul is saying too; with our following the Gospel footsteps and those two precious summarized commandments, real 'community' is nurtured, rooted, fostered, and enjoyed by everyone.

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or

imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3.20-21)