

*Faith* ✦ *Hope* ✦ *Love*

Dear St Alban's Family,

As we begin to enter our Parish workshop and consultation phase, which will lead us to our decision-making response to our building's earthquake assessments, I want to thank you for the way that we have held each other as family and to remind us of the spiritual foundation upon which we come together.

This is a season which calls forth our best. It calls forth our spiritual maturity so that we hold ourselves and each other with great respect, love and grace. I want to remind us of the lessons from Isaiah which were spoken over us in our service of transition and which I exegeted in my first pastoral letter: spiritual maturity is marked by thinking of others' needs above our own and by speaking of the family of God with intentional love, respect and care. In simple terms, we believe the best of each other and we speak the best of each other. We need to recognise that although that sounds simple, living that principle is not easy for us as humans, which is why this season asks so much of us. So, we need perseverance too. What helps us to persevere and to respond with the best of ourselves is understanding how linked these principles are to other people's ability to witness to the truth of our Gospel and the love of Jesus flowing within us and through us. How we live in such a way that considers others (expressed in Isaiah as the alien and the refugee) and how we uphold the family of God, have a direct bearing on

whether we are Christ-centred community with the capacity to heal, and not further hurt, the creation which groans out for the children of God to come into their fullness. It is this maturity of Christ that we are persevering to maintain. We love our beautiful and sacred building, but we must hear the Spirit speaking (as we have in the scriptures of the previous Sundays) about how God feels about us: we are God's building, we are God's garden. We must delight in, and take very seriously, God's call for us to be a beautiful and sacred community which, when people meet, they feel their own beauty and own sacredness increase. People will find that in a loving, welcoming, and self-sacrificial community, they always have and they always will.

So firstly, let me thank you for your exceptional patience and forbearing. We know how eager we all are to move to solutions and the risk of frustrations mounting when the pace is slower than we would like. As we said at the beginning of this process, we will never have a greater opportunity to find fault with each other, so I want to thank you for your grace and dignity in upholding those working very hard behind the scenes with your prayers, and for the loving way we are supporting each other in this challenging time. Secondly, thank you for your openness and grace in coming together as one family. It has been wonderful to see and hear the expressions of joy in our unity, and for that unity I particularly want to honour our 8 O' Clock congregation. Zofia, who has recently joined our parish family, has given me permission to share with you all her comments to me last week, "I have never known a church community like this. It has such an open heart and you can feel that the people really do beat with one heart." We know that things are not ideal, and don't pretend that they are, but we are thankful for the spirit of gratitude and openness that pervades this time of transition. I am particularly

mindful of the surprise joy that we share as a mid-week congregation worshipping in each other's homes. This season has brought unexpected gifts, for which we sincerely thank God and I am personally very thankful for this opportunity to experience and share them with you.

So, as we move into this very delicate time of discerning what the Spirit is saying to the church, I want to offer you the foundation of what remains constant and cannot be taken away: faith, hope and love.

May you have your faith expanded and enlivened through these coming months. May you have faith to believe in the coming of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

May you sincerely hope for good things and may you hope for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

May your love for God and for each other increase over the coming months and as you grow in love for God, for neighbour and for self, may you see God's Kingdom come on earth as it in in heaven.

This is my prayer for you all: that this process will increase your faith, hope and love and as a consequence will increase the living presence of God's Kingdom in Eastbourne and the Bays.

With faith, hope and love for you and in you,

