

Pastoral Letter, December 2016

Dear St Alban's family,

As we journey into Advent, the season of waiting upon God, and approach the end of the calendar year, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their stamina, resilience and commitment to being the family of God together this year. We are so aware of the huge demands that have been placed on our people this year and the emotional strain of this time of transition for our church community.

We journey with many ongoing griefs and a natural anxiety about the present and the future. Yet, we have also experienced many surprise blessings and, in fact, have been a surprise blessing to others. We have received heart-felt thanks from the two parts of our wider Diocese that we have visited in this last month. For both the Cathedral and then at St James, the fact that we turned up in such strong numbers was powerfully noted by their congregations and priests! We were a gift of encouragement to them. Firstly, our presence at the Cathedral gave a gift of solidarity and inspiration, which they would come to note and speak of as they experienced their own dislocation from their building. At the time of our visit this could not have been foreseen. Secondly, the timing of our visit to St James Lower Hutt was a gift to them as they were themselves responding to changing needs and realities in mission and ministry in re-shaping their Sunday pattern of worship. We have been sincerely thanked for our presence with them last week and the gift of encouragement that we were.

The fact that we have shown that we can move together as one people in a strength of numbers, to people and places outside of our immediate community, at a time when we have lost what, in honesty, anchors many people's identity, is a powerful testimony to

other churches. The media of our worldwide Anglican Communion have picked up on our Diocese ordination service last weekend, which took place in the Hope Centre in Lower Hutt because we could not use the Cathedral building. We are being used as a symbol of hope and resilience. We want to thank every one of you for keeping the hope of Christ alive amongst us in your commitment to being family together.

As you will have seen, we will be holding all our Christmas services as usual this year and we will be mail dropping invitations around our communities. We want to end the year in joyful celebration! Let us remember how dislocated Mary and Joseph were when they welcomed Christ into the world. Let us remember the millions of people permanently dislocated from their homes lands as refugees. Let us lift our eyes to the light of the world and affirm together again that the darkness can never overcome the light and life of God with us.

Following our Christmas celebration we want to urge everyone to take some time over this holiday season to abide in God, to rest and renew. Everyone has given much and everyone has experienced much in this year. Take time to be quiet with God, letting go of anxieties and resting in God's peace.

Our continuity of weekly worship continues in January and our first services begin with an opportunity to receive from others more closely in our community, at both San Antonio and St Ronan's Church. We have deep appreciation of the solidarity of support that our neighbouring churches have shown us this year and have received thanks from those communities themselves for the opportunity to share with us in parts of our mission and ministry. We have also affirmed our ongoing joy in being a united witness of God's family hospitality in Eastbourne expressed through our ecumenical Messy Church. We then return to Wellesley in full strength together for the year ahead. Towards the end of January we will have an

opportunity to reflect together on our experience of this transitional pattern of worship and look afresh at how we shape this unusual season in our life together.

Therefore as you enter this season of deeper renewal, we want to offer you a contemplative exercise from Ignatian spirituality that you may find helpful. It is known as the daily examen and it invites us to reflect on the day which has passed and to note in God's presence the desolations of the day alongside also noting the consolations of the day. Reflect on this year and name before God the desolations that you hold in your heart, and know that God comforts those who mourn. Reflect also on the surprise gifts, silver linings, consolations and give thanks to God for his constant goodness and sufficiency of grace. This painting from our dear Annie Hayward, entitled sewing silver linings, may be a lovely prompt for you in this exercise.



So a huge thank you to everyone for the extra miles of 2016, for being unexpected missionaries of hope to others, for being a strong family of God for each other and for having the courage to wait empty handed before the throne of God and say, yet again, “your will not mine be done”.

With love

Ellie, Philip and Heather

