

November 2021 Edition 70

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently. (Psalm 37:7)

Vicar's Letter

I was listening to the radio the other day, and someone expressed a longing to live in “precedented times”. I know what they meant. Somehow, we have run out of words to describe the unexpected and unpredictable nature of life since March 2020.

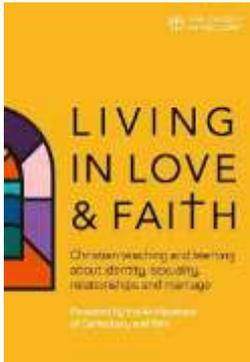
Since September some aspects of “normality” have returned. I have been into one of the local primary schools to lead my first assembly since the pandemic – a celebration of Harvest. 2nd Cuddington Cubs visited St Mary's and explored the building as well as asking as many questions as they could think of about the church building, worship, and faith. The choir returned to lead services in September, and while Sunday worship is still “hybrid” with some people at home on Zoom and others in the church building, in many ways we are back to “normal.”

Yet we continue to live in

uncertain times. While the numbers in hospital with COVID remain relatively stable, the daily case numbers are high. It appears that for some time yet we will be carrying on as normally as we can, while still knowing that we could be stopped at any time. It's an uncomfortable way to live – making plans, yet knowing they could be halted. And all the while seeking to ensure everyone's safety, notably by continuing to wear face coverings and have places where people can maintain social distance.

Perhaps it is particularly reassuring in these times to be able to hold firm to the church seasons. This weekend we will be celebrating All Saints' Day in the morning, and then remembering those who have gone before us at the annual Commemoration Service in the afternoon. We then enter the Kingdom season, before Advent begins at the end of November.

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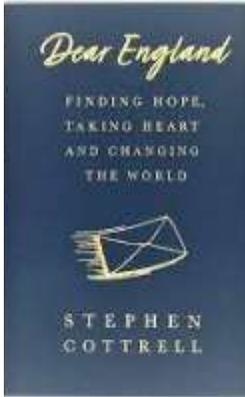
At the October meeting, the PCC discussed the Church of England’s “Living in Love and Faith” material. Over the years, the issue of human sexuality has been much debated within the Church, and there have been significant changes within society, too. Same sex civil partnerships became legal in 2005, and since 2014 same sex couples have been able to get married – though not in church.

Within the Church a wide range of different opinions continue to be voiced. In 2017, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York expressed a need for “a radical new Christian inclusion” and as a result a team of people have worked to produce “Living in Love and Faith”.

“Living in Love and Faith” is a range of teaching material, including a book, video stories and a five-session course. The purpose of the course is to engage with matters of identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage. Ideally these issues would be discussed with people who have both different experiences and different opinions. However, the intention of the materials is not to try to convince other people of our own opinion, but rather to listen to one another, and try to learn together.

I will be leading a “Living in Love and Faith” course in the New Year. If you are interested in finding out more, please speak to me, or you can explore the materials on the Church of England website: [Living in Love and Faith | The Church of England](https://www.churchofengland.org/living-in-love-and-faith). There is an introductory video, and if you log in to the learning hub, you can see a wide range of materials.

The purpose of the course is to engage with these challenging and sensitive issues in an open and generous way. I have always experienced St Mary’s as a welcoming place to all people – and I know that this will continue as we seek to understand more fully what it means to share our lives with others.



I recently read the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell's book "Dear England: Finding Hope, Taking Heart and Changing the World". In the opening chapter, Cottrell sets out his reason for writing the book. While buying a coffee on Paddington Station, he was approached by a young woman who asked: "What made you become a priest?"

Being a keynote speaker at a conference in Wales, and due to get onto his train at any moment, he was only able to provide what he felt to be a partial and inadequate answer: that he believed in God; and that he wanted to change the world. To be fair, what he actually said – even in that short time – was a pretty impressive starting point. Nevertheless, his book provides a fuller answer to the woman's question.

It is perhaps helpful to explain something of the young woman's perspective, because this also helps to make sense of Cottrell's book. "The woman then said to me – and in many respects her words were much more interesting than mine – that when she met people of faith, she found they largely broke down into two categories. For the first group, faith seemed to be their hobby. They went to church – or, for that matter, the synagogue, the mosque, the temple – but it didn't make much difference to the life they led. In most ways their lives were indistinguishable from other people's lives, except for the fact that they went to church on Sunday. The other group – and these are her precise words; they seared themselves into my mind – 'embraced their faith so tightly, it frightened everyone else away'".

The woman's question to Stephen Cottrell was: "Is there another way?"

And so, in "Dear England", Cottrell sets out the foundations of his own faith. While he introduces some stories from the Bible, that is not where he starts. Rather, he seeks to explain why it makes sense to him to believe in God. He then goes on to explore how it might change the world.

If you are looking for a thought-provoking exploration of faith, this is a book for you. It's easy to read and engaging. It might also help you to think about the ways that you share your own faith story with others.

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During Advent we will, as always, be invited to wait patiently and attentively for the annual celebration of God's extraordinary decision to experience our human life as one of us, alongside us in our joys and in our sorrows.

So if you still find yourself unsure whether normality is returning - or what it might mean to be entering a "new normal" – perhaps you can hold on to the familiarity of the church seasons, knowing that God holds us all in love whatever we are feeling.

November Services and Events

Saturday 6	08.30	Men's Group Breakfast at <i>Café Affair</i>
Sunday 7	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Sung Communion and Children's Groups
Monday 8	19.30	Knit & Natter Group in the Leverton Room
Sunday 14	08.00	Holy Communion
	10.30	Remembrance Sunday Service
Wednesday 17	20.00	PCC Meeting
Thursday 18	14.30	Afternoon Club Garden Centre Outing
Sunday 21	08.00	Holy Communion
<i>Christ the King</i>	09.30	Sung Communion and Children's Groups
Tuesday 23	14.30	Knit & Natter Group in the Leverton Room
Saturday 27	10.30	Women's Group in the Cuddington Hall
Sunday 28	08.00	Holy Communion
<i>Advent Sunday</i>	09.30	Sung Communion

Morning Prayer is said in church every weekday morning at 9am

Everyone is very welcome