

January 2024
Dear Church family,

Thank you for your engagement, worship and love of God and each other across the Christmas season. We reached and served more people than ever in my time here, with feedback, follow-ups & possibilities galore heading into the big open spaces of this year. Additionally, £1,125 was raised in the optional seasonal giving, to be shared equally between our Community Compassion Fund & the great work undertaken by Home For Good. Pray on with me for the precious thirteen lives and others who have responded to what Christmas asked of them in new and first ways. Jesus is lighting up people's lives!

Wider still, might I urge you to continue to think, pray & be intentional about those you might ask God about across the weeks of the year ahead? I would love us to be an increasingly 'bringing' church: where we more and more welcome others into the grace and goodness of God by presence, relationship and care.

Between our Sunday teaching series, we will have more clear guest-Sunday opportunities that will be ideal to bring friends, family & those in your networks to, for a credible encounter with the ever widening circle of grace and all that Jesus means. Imagine that one of these Sundays could be a part of the salvation story of those near and dear to you?

There are many opportunities beyond your congregational setting or life group membership, to serve wider in the community through many touchpoints with real lives in the morass of human complexity, where God, faith & Jesus connect. I continue to covet your prayers daily for the many ways I am stretched in sharing more of God's grace.

As I turned into the new-year, the tissue box in my study is numbered ten, reflecting something of the increased pain and distress of guests over the previous twelve months and the reality of the pastoral load. Know that our Pastoral Care Team, myself and others would love to assist if you need space, time and applied grace in a context, situation or prompting from the Lord in any particular way.

I urge you to listen in & engage deeply with the most recent messages I've brought on 'Living into the newness of God' - 31st December and the 'Delight' Overflow message of 7th January, exploring a possible word of the year. This is the fourth year I've taken a word that connects with faith and an anchor scripture and it's a really helpful guide marker, whatever the shape of the meandering year ahead.

We're just about to launch into a rich & nourishing eight-week series in Joshua with much to resource our faith and obedience in Jesus. Following this I have a whole bubble of themes, sparking possible teaching and training resources for Sunday life and beyond. One of the possible series' is around the gift of 'One Another' as we are reminded of the nourishment of life

together. Might I dare you to connect with those who may be unknown to you: offering yourself in conversation, welcome and hospitality to others? We are consistently welcoming guests, friends and newcomers across our four congregations and in those moments are so many possibilities for growth, encouragement and fellowship. The journey of sharing with others changes us!

And in the wider life of Next Door Hextable: Rachel Woodhouse our Cafe Manager writes. "We're encouraged by a growing staff team and an amazing team of volunteers who help make the cafe what it is. Being open six days a week has enabled us to serve our local community and beyond, and we have lots of regular customers who tell us how thankful they are for the cafe as a safe and lovely meeting place. We've been able to hold several great, well supported events, and we hope to see this all developing and growing in 2024 and beyond."

Watch for these and consider your part in this great and growing community resource. Share in the now-regular Quiz night & Board game events with seasonal Afternoon Tea specials planned around Mother's Day: 9th-10th March, and with Easter activities on Saturday 30th March. Sue, Rachel & I sat last week to reflect on how the spaces & missional opportunities of what God has entrusted to us might be further used to reach more people for Jesus.

Bea Reid our Childrens, Youth & Families Minister writes: "The Children's and Youth groups that we run every Sunday at St Peter's are such a great and vital way that we connect with and disciple the young people in our church community. In these groups we make space for children and youth to have fun, connect with friends, and grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus.

In order for these groups to take place, we need leaders and helpers to be part of these groups on Sunday. At the moment, we do not have enough helpers or leaders to cover our groups every week, which means we may not be able to provide these groups on a weekly basis anymore. Discipling our young people is such an important part of what we do at Church, and we so want to be able to regularly do this.

We need people who are able to come along as a helper just once every six weeks or so. The more people who get involved the more we can spread across the weeks each term. Even if you're not quite comfortable leading sessions, just an extra pair of hands would be such a valuable thing to bring to these groups. Helpers for all our groups are needed, but we need help especially in our 7-11s and our 11-16s groups. If you can give just one Sunday morning every six weeks or so, or want to know more about what serving in these groups might look like, please just drop me an email bea@stph.org.uk or come find me after the 10:30 service on a Sunday." I've restarted in some volunteering time in Thursday and Sunday sessional work and there is much gain as you serve in this way. Please consider this & contact Bea?

And having checked in with Chris Redmond in his treasury lead for us within the PCC, and as a local charity, our key balances and top headlines at the end of 2023 are General fund £7k, Mission fund £12k Community Compassion fund £2k and Building fund loans £72.5k owing. So very much has been achieved in 2023 having completed a major refurbishment of the back toilets and kitchen, as well as new flooring in the back hall and creche. Also the building fund loans needed to complete the annex have been paid down significantly from £217k to £72.5k over the year, meaning the loans will be repaid much earlier than planned. For 2024 the church intends to pay a further £45k towards the building fund loans, as well as meeting its regular costs relating to staffing, new ventures, higher utility bills and the wider building fabric upkeep. None of this would have been possible without the regular faithful giving of our church congregation, which is how the church receives almost all of its funding. Sincerest thanks for all

your part in making this possible. There is no central Church of England or regional funding pot that resources our shared life, witness & associated costs, so might each of us review how we give, love & share further in the work of God together?

We're committed to building a central church diary to integrate all ministries, for clearness and ease across St Peter's, St Paul's the witness of Next Door Hextable and our wider community presence. Fast approaching is our guest special planned for Thursday 8th February with Steve Legg, so please invite your guests for this super accessible fun night. There's lots brewing for an early Easter, in the last week of March. There'll be lots of touch points for depth, growth & further life in God, including a rededication Sunday night special on Easter Sunday night.

Note Sunday 28th April for our 12noon APCM also if you might. And there's a date being finalised with the Bishop's Office for a baptism & confirmation celebration which is always a significant opportunity for sharing and deepening faith journeys. There's a substantial building out of the Men's ministry brewing, lots of lively Community events being planned, ongoing Woven Women's ministry goodness with nurture, input & care for so many other ministries across church life. There's capacity for a number of new daytime and evening life groups to be planted to welcome more people into.

So into this new-newness of God...

What is the renewal and reset that this New Year can bring?

Might you review your giving, loving and service in and through church life?

In our heavy, challenging & often heart-shredding world, might you keep on leaning forward in sure hope, sustained by God your maker.

Sincerest thanks for your life, faith & service!

It consistently encourages my life greatly.

Your friend & vicar,

Johnny
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