



May 2021

Reverend John writes:



‘So long – and thanks for all the fish!’

As a boy my first experience of angling was with a fishing-mad school friend on the Oxford canal just to the north of Coventry. It was a memorable experience, for all the wrong reasons – it poured with rain, I dropped my lunch in the canal, and we sat for five hours catching nothing. My only bite, a tiny gudgeon, took the bait off my hook but I failed to reel it in. Clearly I was no fisherman!

Some of you will of course recognise the heading of this article from Douglas Adams’ – it is the title of the fourth and final novel of ‘The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy’, a long time favourite of mine. Jesus called his disciples to be ‘fishers of men’, and it has been my privilege to be such an angler for the last 22 years.

The parishes of Great Wyrley (where I served my title), Altham and Clayton-le-Moors and latterly Chelsfield and Green St Green have been a rich fishing ground. In my ministry I calculate that I have presided over 750 baptisms, 150 weddings, 600 funerals, 500 school assemblies, and around 3000 church services – each of which has offered the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those attending. Some of these encounters have led to people being won for Christ, though I am conscious that there have been a good number who have taken the bait and wriggled off the hook – like my first gudgeon. My fishing skills are still far from perfect!

I have been blessed by the experience of sharing in many diverse forms of worship, from the poetic beauty of Cranmer in the Book of Common Prayer, to off the wall unscripted evangelical praise for those with no connection to church. It has been a real privilege to prepare candidates for Confirmation, to teach ‘worship and spirituality’ to students for lay ministry, and to train curates and sponsor candidates



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for ordination. My wider ministry has been varied and interesting, having seen service as Area Dean, Parish Mission Enabler, Sea Cadet Chaplain, School Governor, and Chair of Diocesan Investment committee.

Though my initial acceptance of the post as Rector of Chelsfield was influenced more by proximity to our grandchildren, than the challenge of parish reorganization – these have been seven good years for Janet and me. Chelsfield has been a good place to complete my time in stipendiary ministry and we leave having made new friends and enjoying much love and fellowship in this place.

As you know, we intended to retire last year, but stayed on to see the parish through the Covid crisis – and though ministry in this year has been strange – it has been good to learn new ways and develop new skills in worship and ministry.

So the time has come to say goodbye – something we have had to do in stages as Covid restrictions have restricted gatherings. Our final services at Well Hill and St Martin's will linger long in our memories – but it did not seem right to leave without being able to shake hands, share hugs, and share refreshment with all the church family. We hope to complete our goodbyes when we return for our final farewell on Sunday 4th July at 10.00am.

Chelsfield and all the other churches I have served have been good boats to fish from! So long and thanks for all the fish, and please keep helping Rev Susan with the nets!

Yours in Christ,

Reverend John.

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