

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH LENT 3 YEAR C 24 MARCH 2019

Big Lottery 99,000 + 1,000

CC of Burton 28,000

Veolia 38,000

Retired Priest Service £53.

I'm not preaching about today's readings. There are two subjects I'm going to talk about.

First, you may have heard the wonderful news. Subject to one or two minor administrative matters, the Red Lion House Charity has been awarded £164,000 to make the ground floor of the pub fully functional as a community centre. Many thanks to the Big Lottery Fund, the Consolidated Charity of Burton, and Veolia who make Landfill tax grants. Work should be completed this year.

It has been an uphill task, with setbacks along the way. A number of people from S. John's and the wider community have worked very hard. Dealing with repeated applications has been a draining experience. I know the Trustees of the charity would join me in paying a massive tribute to Margaret Collier who has persevered with filling in complicated forms, assembling supporting evidence and so on, at times when the prospect of success seemed to be slipping away.

Red Lion House will be a great asset to the community. The community, including S. John's Church, still have to make it work: use, administer and maintain the facility. It will not solve all the issues we face, but it could transform our life in a thoroughly positive way. It will be a great resource for mission. I feel we're in a position rather like that of the Israelites who've journeyed through the wilderness for forty years and are now poised to enter the promised land. Let us remember that Moses told them there was still plenty to do to make a success of settling in their new homeland. But we've come a long way. Faith has paid off, and much prayer has been offered. Thanks be to God!

The second subject is quite a different matter. It's about maintaining all the services we have at S. John's. We've discussed things at our Parochial Church Council. Let me say immediately that I hope to keep the services going as much as possible: four on a Sunday and five weekday masses. But things have changed since I came to Horninglow eighteen years ago. Then there was a curate, Fr Matthew, a retired priest Fr George, and a former curate Fr Trevor, all with close links to our church, taking services and preaching on a regular and frequent basis. Now I am on my own.

Duncan Gorwood will be coming as curate in June, and he will be a help particularly when he's priested a year later. But for the time being there will be occasions, such as annual leave, when I'm not available to preside at mass.

What can we do?

1. Get another priest. There are different categories of clergy. Some are stipendiary: that is, paid by the Church of England. There are fewer stipendiary priests than a few years ago. Most have more than one church in their care. It is unlikely that such a priest would be available on a Sunday. Other clergy are Self-Supporting Ministers, of working age but not paid by the C of E. There aren't many of them: only Ashley Hines in our deanery. At present Ashley is attached to the Anslow, Rolleston and Tutbury group of churches and takes Sunday services there. Then there are retired clergy with Permission to Officiate. These may be more available. If we ask one of them to lead a service, the rule is that we should pay them £53. That may be justified for the main Sunday service. It is less easy to justify for the others, and even less so for some of the weekday masses when there may be just two communicants.
2. Ask a suitably authorised lay person to lead a modified service and give communion with bread and wine that has already been consecrated. We keep our Lord's sacramental body and blood in the tabernacle. This happened recently during the compassionate leave I had after Rita's death. On behalf of all of us I thank the people who stood in again. But we cannot assume they will be available. Nor should they feel they have a duty to cover if I'm not around.
3. Cancel services, with as much notice as possible. The PCC agreed that this may be necessary on occasion. They offered their support, and were sure that worshippers would understand. This already happens in other parishes in the deanery.

There is a wider context to this debate. It is a particular issue at S. John's because of the number of masses we have. We can also look beyond our parish boundaries, and ask if it's necessary to have, for example, a 9.30 Mass at S. John's on a Friday and a 12.30 Mass at S. Paul's the same day. Or two masses on a Wednesday morning, one at S. John's and the other at S. Modwen's. It is a fact that you can't discontinue a service without causing some upset. One hopes people will understand. I commend these matters to your prayers, and I am always willing to hear what anybody thinks.