**Guiding Principles for 2021 for St Paul’s, Wokingham: a discussion document which is part of an ongoing conversation**

*“Shaped by God in the Eucharist, we are called to make the richness of his love known to everyone in the community.” (St Paul’s Vision Statement)*

**Guiding principles for 2021** *(which is the main point of this document)*

Guided by God, we will restore old things and try new things if they meet one or more of these criteria:

1. a vital opportunity for public service and witness which we are best positioned to respond to,
2. a core aspect of who we are as a Church community which will help us to reform and regather as a family, whether in person or online or both,
3. something which excites us and which will enthuse us, and where the resources, leaders and volunteers are already clearly identified, or quickly found,
4. a necessary part of resourcing our mission and visibility, e.g. the Church building itself, the website, our public profile.

**Where we are, or self-scouting**

Because of the last 12 months we have a unique and unexpected opportunity to define the life of St Paul’s for 2021 and the years to come. We have been forced to stop doing a lot of things which had been passed on to us. We have been presented with a whole range of new opportunities to be of service in the community, building on relationships we had built up in good times which (like Joseph and the Egyptian famine) have got us through this last year of hardship and endurance.

This is not, I would argue, the moment for medium-term planning of three or five years. We need to hold together our overarching vision and sense of call with our response to the immediate opportunities before us. We are called and invited to focus on the values which define St Paul’s, as a specific and particular expression of the Church of God, and steer by that guiding star: and we are called to be agile and responsive to immediate needs and opportunities at the same time as they arise.

A process of reflection, of being open to the guidance of the Spirit, is vital- through it, we may still end up with a Church which looks very like it did in 2019 but we will be there with a new focus and a new understanding and a new motivation because we will honestly be saying that ‘this is the Church which is best positioned to serve the community and to bear witness to the love of God in Wokingham in 2021.’

Whatever we choose to do must align with who we are as a Church community and what we carry with us. These things are visible in the way we meet God in worship, the way we journey together and the clear understanding we have of our need to be active in the world. These next months will be a season of restoration and focus which will, inspired by the Holy Spirit, position us to be a blessing to the parish in years to come. We need to get it right by asking the right questions and making the right decisions through prayer and listening.

**What we have learnt in the last 12 months**

1. There are things which only the Church can do locally-

in connecting groups and shaping a common vision with them,

in drawing together every aspect of the community,

in being an honest broker who is able to deliver effectively and quickly by drawing on the links we already have

and by working with other Churches as well- e.g. supporting Care Homes, collecting for the RBH.

1. We are also able to make decisions relatively quickly because we have a shallow organisational hierarchy,

e.g. agreeing to host the Foodbank in January 2021,

working with Holme Grange School to deliver a meal a week to a handful of people in the local community.

We can be responsive without a lot of meetings.

1. Neither of these items are necessarily how we saw ourselves before the pandemic but we have found our niche in the last year. Sometimes we are the people who spot the moment and use our resources and connections to make something happen. Sometimes we are the catalyst which brings things together. We don’t do things on our own and we are not always the people with the plan. Hence our emphasis on who we are and that we want to serve the community- and our emphasis on responsive agility and speed of action during a pandemic.
2. We have also learnt to do some things well and to stand by them, rather than trying to cover every base and copy what everyone else is doing, eg by supporting Nursing and Care Homes and leaving others to carry on supporting individuals needing a food delivery.
3. Worship is still worship, whatever the limitations we meet under. People all over the world over the centuries have found this but we have had the luxury of never having to work it out before. But it’s true- God turns up, and God is gracious, and God is love. And worship feeds us still, and inspires us, and unites and heals us- and, through God at work before and in us, the world.
4. The six PMC Spiritual Practices are a solid foundation for our reflection on the world and our attention to God, through which we can explore God’s call in our lives and into the community.

**Some points of focus as we come towards the end of this lockdown**

1. Rediscover firm foundations without making too many binding decisions too quickly,
2. Regather the Church family, among them the housebound and those who continue to self-isolate, and those who live some distance away,
3. Remember what we have found of the community around us so we can serve them better and bear witness,
4. Reflect on what the Church has been found to be and build on that,
5. Be responsive to new opportunities and challenges emerging in the community and individual lives after lockdown- if big questions have come to the surface then we need to be able to respond well and warmly.

All of which leads us back to the…

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**What next?**

Please pray about the thoughts contained in this document- is anything missing?

Please fill in the SurveyMonkey questions which Bertie will be sending out this week around what we have found and what we should prioritise. These will be picked up in a meeting post-Easter: then this document will be finalised by the end of April.

Be involved over the next weeks- pass on your ideas and the things you’re noticing. Respond to new thoughts and proposals. Commit to being part of rebuilding things by turning up to the things you want to, both online and in person.

Let’s run together towards the things God is preparing for us, and preparing us for, with hope and pleasure in both the journey and the destination, in the road and in the ending, in the moment and in the Church we are called to be together.

the Rev’d Richard Lamey: March the 15th 2021

PS- At a recent training session around young people and the Church, Steve Collins said: “Creation is God’s what if.” Maybe “What if…?” is the question for this moment- what if families were asked to teach each other?

what if God is the most interesting and exciting thing one could ever know?

what if Church was a game of hide and seek round the village?

what if the children taught us how to tell people about Jesus and led our mission work?