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**Briefing 59: Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2021.**

Dear Friends,

Last week I gave some brief reflections on the changes (or not) that have happened to our buildings, and raised some questions about our love of the Scriptures. This week, as part of my contribution to a 10-year review, I want to reflect a little on where we are in our commitment to prayer, service and giving.

I'm sure you would agree that prayer is absolutely vital to a healthy Christian life. Any relationship struggles to keep going if we never talk and never listen. That is certainly true with prayer and the Christian life. And whilst we can, of course, pray little 'arrow prayers' at any moment of the day, spending serious time with God in prayer, having long conversations, pouring out our heart to him, and having time to listen to his Holy Spirit is crucial if we want to grow in our faith.

If I'm honest, I have struggled with that over the last 10 years. Despite teaching on prayer, running a Lent course on prayer, I confess that I haven't prayed as I should. I haven't prayed for you all as I should. Looking back, I'm aware that I have more often than not sought to serve in my own strength and by my own efforts. Despite this, by God's grace and mercy, we have seen people come to faith, we have seen change and growth, but nowhere near the level which God might have accomplished, had we, had I, devoted ourselves to prayer.

Perhaps it's taken me 10 years to realise my limitations, but I do now realise them all too well. As a benefice we have tried many different initiatives and programmes to grow God's kingdom; we haven't committed ourselves to pray. That is my commitment now, hence the Friday night prayer gatherings, hence the almost incessant invitations to join with others in prayer.

So how do you see our prayer life as God's people at St Nicholas and St Mary's? Can we truly say that we are committed to prayer together? When we do pray as individuals or in home groups, are we praying what Alistair Begg called 'big prayers', about spiritual and eternal matters? Do we believe that God will answer our prayers and that he can change us and use us to reach the lost in our families, our streets, our places of work, our schools and our town? And if our prayer life is not what it should be, how can we make it better? We have a heavenly Father who longs for us to pray and promises to listen, what is stopping us?

From an almost entirely spiritual exercise to one which is more practical in application: willing service and generous giving. 10 years ago, our benefice struggled to pay its annual Parish Share and had little money left for mission, evangelism or giving away. However, apart from 2019 when St Nicholas was out of its building and in the midst of the building project, we have paid every year. Over that time, we've also spent far more on mission and evangelism, given away thousands of tracts, hundreds of gospels, contributed well over £100,000 to the St Nicholas building project. At the same time, both churches have given away more money to support Christian mission at home and abroad. I praise God for the way he has provided for us and touched people's hearts to give.

In the same way, it's been a delight to see more people step forward to serve in the church. Both churches now have more people involved on Sunday mornings; as intercessors and readers, welcomers, with our children's work or using their musical gifts. Over the last 12 months or so the numbers serving have necessarily been smaller – we've obviously been doing less – but a handful of people have served us sacrificially and I'm so thankful to God for them. I hope you are too.

But as we return to some semblance of normality and seek to grow, there is more that needs doing, and so more people are needed to serve. Some of those who are currently serving have done so for many years, and long to step down and serve in a new way, but that's hard when others who could serve, are reluctant to give up the time. Why is that?

And whilst the finances at St Nicholas are in a healthier state than for many years, there's more we'd like to do. In Graveley, St Mary's is struggling to make its contribution to the St Nicholas Parish share and it has no money left over for investing in growth or changing its building.

If the health and strength of a local church is shown by its commitment to pray, our love and devotion to Jesus and his kingdom is demonstrated in no small way by our willingness to serve and give sacrificially. Is that true of us as individuals? Is that true of us as a church? I was challenged recently by a preacher who asked if our lives showed that our real hope was in heaven; if our lives showed that we were living for what is yet to come? Is that true of us? And if not, how might we become more willing to trust God with our time, talents and money?

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*

**Prayer is Vital  
Come + pray**

## **IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!**

**Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm.** Bring a Bible, and join us to pray for ourselves + for the church.

**Private prayer in church THIS WEEK.** Tuesday (13<sup>th</sup>) from 12noon-2pm, Wednesday (14<sup>th</sup>) 2pm-4pm, and Thursday (15<sup>th</sup>) 10am – 12 noon.

**Next Tuesday from 7am-8am.** Our regular early morning prayer meeting. Contact Dave for a link.

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> from 7:45pm-9pm** - Church Prayer gathering via Zoom with Jimmy Rocks joining us from Brazil. Contact Dave for a link.

**ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETINGS:** St Nicholas APCM will be after the morning service on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April, St Mary's APCM will be after the morning service on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April. Please put the date in your diary and do your best to come along. [If you'd like a zoom link, do contact Alison.](#)

### **FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND PRAYER.**

Despite this appearing in last week's sheet and being mentioned on Sunday, only two people have come forward-one from each church. We can only do these things with volunteers, and if we don't get volunteers, we won't be able to do them. So please don't wait to be asked. If God is prompting you to serve, please get in touch

**1: Treasurer for Graveley:** Honesty and integrity, and a confidence with numbers, spreadsheets and online banking required. If you worship at St Nicholas and could do this role, we can co-opt you onto the PCC.

**2: Helpers and teachers for Sunday morning children and youth work:** Be part of the team helping to teach our children and young people the good news of Jesus. Patience, kindness and a DBS check required. Parents of children- would you please consider serving as a helper in a different group to your children? **We need people now!**

**3: Catering and refreshments coordinator for St Nicholas.** We'll soon be able to open the kitchen again – can you put together a team to offer refreshments after morning services, and be able to coordinate food for other events such as Newcomer's Lunches, Christianity Explored courses, etc. Is that you? Are you willing to play a part in these? There is no kitchen at **St Marys**, but we love refreshments after morning services. Would someone from the congregation take on that role there?

**4: Evangelism Team.** We want to re-establish our team doing door-to-door visiting, expanding it to include running termly enquiries courses for those investigating the Christian faith. Is God calling you to serve in this way?

**5: We also need more welcomers and stewards (contact Karen), more musicians and singers (contact Judy) and more people to help with the technical side of things (contact Anthony Taylor, Edward Kaahwa or Paul Drakes)**

**BIBLE BY THE BEACH COMES TO STEVENAGE:** For the last few years, a number of us have gone to this conference in Eastbourne. This year it is on line and just for one day: Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May. We are hoping to be able to broadcast the main sessions in St Nicholas Church with the hope that people (in groups of 6 or less) can discuss them outside afterwards over a coffee or (weather permitting) a picnic. More details will follow, but why not pencil the date in now and come along.