

## A letter from Fr Stephen

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The Apostle Paul said:

***'Aim for perfection, be of one mind, live in peace. Greet one another with a holy kiss.'***

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

I write to you on the eve of our first meal together, although it looks like we will now be in the hall as the weather has beaten us. Some six months after I arrived here at St Wilfrid's, I remain convinced that God has brought me to this place for a very special task. A work that involves us together in partnership fulfilling God's plan for our community. It has been a joy and challenge working as your parish priest and chaplain to Bishop Luffa school. Before I go on a much-needed holiday from Monday I would like to share with you some of the things I have been doing over the last six months. It is not in boasting that I do this, but in praise to Jesus for the way in which he has been faithful to me.

Since arriving at St Wilfrid's, it has been a privilege to minister and break bread with you, to pray with you, get to know you and share a laugh and tear. It has been fantastic to be able to welcome you to the vicarage, a place that is a blessing and a sanctuary for David and I. A place, that I am sure over the years will also become a blessing for you our church family. A big part of ministry here has been visiting you in your homes and own places of sanctuary. I thank God for the warmth, kindness, and generosity you have shown me as I have visited you. I look forward to many more cups of tea, communion, and cake in the future. Please know that it is a joy for me to bring the sacrament to you when you are unable to attend church so, please always ask if you need me to visit. Sadly, for some of you coming to church is not possible, so much of my time has been spent visiting you in your residential homes. Please be assured of my constant prayers for you and I am sorry I cannot see you more often.

When I arrived in Parklands, having been a curate in lockdown, I still had (and in fact still have) much to learn about being a parish priest. Thank you for allowing me to learn what it is to be the priest that God has called me to be. To be honest arriving just in time for Holy week was a baptism of fire, but by the grace of God and the encouragement of churchwarden Jo I got through. In terms of the sacramental nature of our worship it has been a blessing to preside at the altar and to break bread with you. I have also enjoyed the opportunity to be creative with our screens in church, creating visuals to accompany our liturgy. This is also something that I think we can only get better at in the future.

Speaking of the future there are many challenges and opportunities ahead for us as a church; challenges that we will face together with Jesus at the centre of all that we do. We must not be afraid of the future; we should embrace it. However, we must always be mindful of those in times gone past that built St Wilfrid's, those who sadly are no longer with us. Those that in the past have given their time, prayer, and resources to make St Wilfrid's what it is today. In embracing what lies ahead we will always celebrate and remember those that have gone before us, because it is on their shoulders that we stand.

The school has also provided many opportunities for ministry and mission. Much of my time has been spent establishing myself as the school chaplain. I have done this through a number of ways.

- Taking tutor times for over 750 students
- Whole school assemblies
- Getting involved with the Christian union
- Welcoming the new Y7's to BLS through summer school

- Assisting in Y8 field trips
- Working with the year group worship representatives to organise and create Eucharist liturgy
- Providing pastoral support and counselling, to both staff and students
- Leading a weekly staff prayer meeting and celebrating Mass for the staff
- In September, 250 year 7 students will come to St Wilfrid's to experience their first school Eucharist. There are plans a foot for the first ever whole school Eucharist
- Attending senior leadership meetings that plan and strategize the school acts of Christian worship
- Supporting Austen (the head) through prayer and conversation, establishing a great working partnership
- Simply being a presence (never to be underestimated).

These are some of the things I have been up to, and there are many exciting new things planned for next term. I will finally have my own chaplain space and a place to call home in the school. I can confidently report that the last term in school has been amazing. I have seen God work in so many wonderful ways in both staff and students lives. I have also contacted Parkland's primary school and will be assisting them in their collective worship in the 21/22 academic year, building bridges for the future. I hope that this short letter is an encouragement to you my church family, as we re-emerge from lockdown. In many ways we are starting again, and this is a new chapter in our history. A chapter of which we are the authors of. A chapter that I pray we will together see God's blessing upon.

Finally, for all who are able come along to the vicarage tomorrow for a party, a chance to welcome the new and remember the past. We will be joined by members of St Andrew's Steyning, my last church where I served my curacy. We never got chance to say goodbye to them when we left so some of them will be present. Please say hello and welcome them in good old St Wilfrid's fashion. For many of you it will be the first time you have seen the new vicarage and some of you probably fondly remember the old one. One thing is the same, and that is the Indian bean tree. A tree many of you have mentioned to me and I must confess it has grown on me.

Thank you all so much for the love and kindness you have shown David and I since we have arrived. For all your words of encouragement and prayers, they really mean a lot. See you on Sunday when we can all raise a glass, have a giggle and some delicious food.

With love and prayers.

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