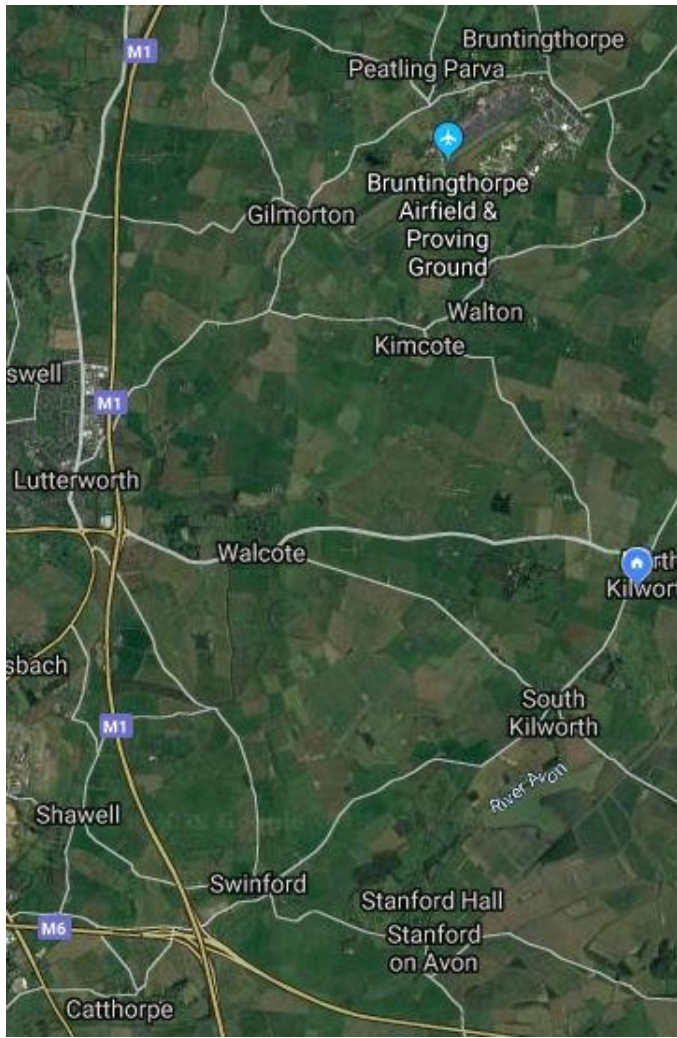


Rural Roles!



(Image - The Avon-Swift benefice area)

Dear friends,

Who amongst us can remember what we were doing in August 2000??? It seems a lifetime ago, doesn't it? Just as well we write things down! Helpfully one of the things we mark is passages of the Bible that we believe are important and that speak to us about specific situations – part of the discernment process we need to be doing continually to be in the centre of God's will for our lives.

So helpfully, this morning's readings included a favourite and well noted passage of ours that has been significant many times in the past – in August 2000 as we waited to go to France - and again on the day Stephen was appointed to his present post, among others. From Deuteronomy 8, it reads like this –

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

*He humbled you... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD...*

Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.

For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills...a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing....

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God.

So why are these words significant now?

Well, you may remember that Stephen's post comes to end this autumn. Although we have a place to live through Sharon's part-time 'house for duty' role as a Lay Pioneer Minister, we were wondering what God's plan for the future would be, and becoming a bit anxious, as you can imagine!

Recent events have moved at such a pace that we have found it amazing to see how God has put all the pieces together... we will explain!!

The only full-time vicar in our Avon Swift family of 11 churches, Emma, announced that she had accepted a call to be seconded to Leicester Cathedral on the July 1st to be in charge of the liturgy and services for a year.

Quickly after this news we then heard that our curate will also be moving to his first vicar post, beginning on 1st September.

So the Archdeacon has been meeting with our family of churches to help us respond to this new situation.

The outcome, after much discussion and prayer, is that Stephen has been appointed to a 3 day a week position of spiritual oversight with responsibility for vision and mission here in our Avon-Swift team.

Sharon's role has also been increased from 3 to 4 days a week to cover the line management of our newly- appointed administrator, without of course losing any of the pioneering that she is passionate about.

Our other part-time curate, Rob, is staying with us, as is Dawn, our ordinand and there will be priestly cover 2 days a week from a neighbouring parish to help us cover Sunday services and baptisms, weddings and funerals. But, all in all, everything will be new come September 1st!!

We need your prayers. As you can imagine, church members are struggling with the rate of change and the complete re-think of the system that will be happening. It is difficult to give up the familiar and the well-known; the routines and services that are comfortable. Reassuring them will be a priority, but we are excited about the Diocese's investment in us as people and in further developing this new model of ministry in which lay people will play a key part.

The 1st of September will be upon us very soon, and there is a lot to be done. So we are grateful to God for our reading today mentioned above, the morning after the changes were announced in a parish meeting, a sign, we believe to remind us of God's hand leading and guiding our lives.

We hope and pray that Stephen can find some other work, as a reduction to a 3 day role will have big financial implications for us. However, this feels like God at work and we are really happy that once again we will be able to work together, modelling and encouraging discipleship and mission in our 11 villages.

We are very much trusting God to supply what we need, financially as well as in energy, focus and in discerning how to give leadership to these churches. Nothing new!



(Image – Family wedding photograph)

We spent an amazing few days in France in April at Carole and Caleb's wedding in Dijon. It was a fantastic time, and we were so grateful everything worked out in the end – welcome to the latest Mrs March!!

As we write, the family is scattered more than usual, with Ben visiting Canada for an extended holiday, stopping off at Sarah's, Stephen's sister's, on the way.

Stephen's Mum is in the process of selling her home in Rhyl to move back to Kilsyth. Josh and Lindsay are doing well in Dundee, and we are delighted that Lindsay starts an exciting new job in the next few weeks!

The changes and the challenges of the past 9 months have been many and varied, and we are quite tired, if we are honest.

We have;
said goodbye to dear friends and NEARER in Birstall,
moved house,
hosted visiting pioneers from Wyoming, Germany and France,
started a new job,
left school governance,
dragged 40 feet of ivy from the garden walls,
learned lots about Parochial Church Councils,
identified, mentored and supported new pioneers,
gotten to know new colleagues,
planted potatoes, onions, radishes and strawberries (although only the birds have benefited!!),
travelled to Strasbourg, Scotland and Dijon,
had two services with our Bishop,
found our way around 11 villages,
preached,
tried out new coffee shops,
resorted to home delivery for the shopping,
done assemblies in 4 schools,
led Pioneer school,
attended 8 conferences,
married a son,
led pilgrimages,
celebrated Easter at sunrise in our garden....
and now we have new roles!

We hope to be away in Norfolk next month for a week, and as you can imagine, we are looking forward to having a holiday very much!

August will see the team try to plan at least the start of a new ministerial pattern in which prayer must be central if we are to see change and growth not only in the number of disciples, but also in depth of discipleship.

September's plan is to prayer-walk all 11 villages.

Please pray for us.

Be blessed, be a blessing!



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