

“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”



Dear friends,

Apologies for the lateness of this New Year letter! We have found that running 11 rural churches is quite a demanding task – who knew!? We are struggling to keep pace with things and I’m afraid that preparing this letter slipped a bit.

We do however want to wish you our very best for 2020 and to thank you for your on-going prayers and financial support. As you will see, we are still very much in need of both as we head into 2020! We hope you will use the enclosed fridge magnet as a prayer reminder over the coming year.

The words at the top of the page come from that famous passage in Ezekiel 37. When the prophet is shown a landscape full of dry bones bleached by the sun and God asks him, “Son of man, can these bones live?” The words quoted above are Ezekiel’s response.

As we face 2020, we feel ourselves to be very much in the same place of Ezekiel – we see all kinds of possibilities - but what will actually happen is not at all evident to us, it is a mystery known only to God.

Mystery 1 – Employment/Financial Provision – Stephen’s 3 day a week role with the diocese of Leicester supporting and encouraging pioneers and Fresh Expressions of Church will end on 31st March 2020. Stephen’s other 3 day a week role, as team leader for the 11 village Avon-Swift benefice, comes to an end at the end of June when the vicar is due to end her secondment. So, as things currently stand, by July Stephen will have no paid work.

Sharon works 3 days a week in a House for Duty role – so no money, but we get to live in the rectory. Sharon also does a couple of days a month working for the diocese organising and delivering training.

Our sense is that God wants us to continue to minister in this context, but how that can happen is not clear. So will we find the paid work we need to enable us to stay here? - Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Mystery 2 – Ministry – We are seeing some green shoots of hope in our efforts to develop new ways of being and doing church in this rural context. Over the next few months we will try to launch a monthly outdoor church for young families based in one of our local Church of England primary schools. This feels like an exciting new prospect, we see God bringing us into contact with people we think would be good partners for us to work with. But will it succeed and create a new worshipping community – a fresh expression of church? – Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Mystery 3 – Building Community – Over the past few months Stephen has set up a Photography Club in the village where we live. There are about a dozen people who have come along at various points. There is a good sense of people

helping and encouraging each other, sharing their skills, learning new ways of being creative in their hobby. Will it continue to grow and will there be sufficient interest for a small team to work with Stephen to keep it going after the summer? – Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Mystery 4 – Church and Community Links – Our local church building is closed for 6 months for redevelopment. We are putting in a toilet (7 of our 11 churches don't have toilets!), new heating and lighting, removing some pews to give a more flexible space and creating a kitchen area. While the church is closed we are doing 'Church on Tour' taking our services to where the people are in the village.

On Christmas Eve we did a Pop-Up Nativity on the village green and over 80 people – most of whom non-church goers – came along. This month we are doing an 'Explained Holy Communion' in the village hall, next month we are having our service in the village pub. Will these attempts to connect with people who don't normally attend church be successful, will new people see and hear something of the Christian message and will God use that to draw them to Himself? – Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Mystery 4 – Vocation – Stephen has felt it right to explore the possibility of ordination as a priest in the Church of England. After a series of conversations and a first report, an initial green light has been given for him to start the formal discernment process. This is quite a slow process in the Church of England and a definitive response is not likely before April 2021. Does God want Stephen to become an Anglican priest? – Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Stephen is currently engaged in training to become a Spiritual Director. This is a two year formation that runs until summer 2021. Will God use Stephen to help people through this particular ministry? – Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Mystery 5 – Writing – For a couple of years Stephen has had an on-going project to write a book drawing out lessons for 21st century pioneers of Fresh Expressions of Church from the life of St Brendan – a 5th century Irish missionary monk. About 75% of the book is already written but Stephen has struggled to find the necessary blocks of time needed to complete it. Will 2020 see this book completed and in print? – Sovereign Lord, you alone know.

Family continues to be a joy and it was wonderful to share time over the holidays with all of them! We are thankful and grateful for the short times we are able to spend together.

As we stand at the opening of 2020 we do so with some trepidation, some excitement, some hope. The past year has been a time of particular uncertainty – which, if we are honest – has sometimes been hard to live with.

However, as we stand here, well into our 5th decade, we look out on the prospect of change, new things to learn, new adventures to have, new hopes for mission and ministry. Following God's call may have its challenges, but at least you are never bored!

Pray that we adventure well with God in 2020.

Our prayers and blessings for you accompany this letter.

Be blessed, be a blessing!



Stephen & Sharon MARCH

Address : The Rectory, 21 Dag Lane, North Kilworth, LE17 6HD

Tel : +44 (0)1858 881212

Email : marches@marchsite.com

www.fuelforpilgrims.org

www.runningwithgod.org

www.marchsite.com