Issue 7: 12th February, 2025.

Dear Friends,

*“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*.” 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13

We often think about this verse in relation to a single worshipping community or Church. Different members have been given different gifts by God to use for the building up of his kingdom, and the body of Christ in that place functions best when all those gifts are used together without favouring or lording one kind of gift over another. It’s also a challenge to make sure that we are playing our part in our church. Outside of those who are still settling in, examining the Christian faith, or who are too elderly or infirm to play an active role, everyone in a church should be active in loving and giving and serving. Is that true of you, I wonder?

But the analogy of a well-functioning body also carries over to our multi-church Parish. It still requires everyone to play their part, and it requires even more collaboration for that work to be effective in building God’s kingdom.

At our recent PCC meeting we spent some time thinking about the benefits and difficulties of being a multi-church parish, and how we can either make the most of the benefits or mitigate the difficulties. Over the next two weeks I’ll be reflecting on these issues and suggesting some solutions. Can I encourage you in your individual worshipping communities to do the same?

Joys and blessings of being 1 Parish of 5 Churches.

Reflecting together at our PCC meeting, we shared many of the benefits. Here are a few:

* We can have a variety of worship styles in different places- allowing everyone to find a spiritual home that suits their preferred style.
* We can pool resources for larger events- such as the Christmas Journey- which a single church would not have been able to do on their own- or Church Weekends at Home.
* We share our PCC Secretary, Treasurer, Safeguarding Team- posts that would be hard to fill if each church stood on its own.
* We share and benefit from the physical, financial and human resources we have between us. For example- we share a choir between Ogwell and Highweek and we share organists; St Paul’s and Abbotsbury offer large meeting spaces we can all use; we have a benefice office providing parish-wide admin support; and the large income from the hall rentals and car park at St Paul’s, the mast at Highweek and the WEC grants benefit our whole Parish.
* We share in discipleship and evangelistic courses, ensuring larger and more vibrant groups, rather than having to run them separately with smaller numbers.

I hope you can see the benefits of being in a 5-church Parish from these few examples. But these are still a tiny proportion of the things that we do together. Here are some more!

*Website Mission partners Schools work Wedding prep*

*Baptism prep Nursing homes visits Prayer gatherings Town outreach*

*Funerals Men’s/women’s breakfasts Evensongs Care of buildings*

*Shared services 1 parish share between us! A share d clergy team*

I wonder, do we see these things as something we do together, or something that a single church does? Are we upset that some things are based in another building or being led by people from a different church, or do we rejoice that our Parish does such things?

**Recognising** what we are already doing together and seeing that we would be unable to do such things if we were 5 single parishes is a good first step to celebrating our 5-Church Parish. Do we do that? Or are we so focused on our own worshipping community that we don’t really give the wider parish much of a thought?

The second step is to **get involved** in some of these cross-parish initiatives. All of us can be praying for the things I’ve mentioned, but how about getting involved in just one shared mission activity? Could you join the small team visiting nursing homes and help with the singing? Could you offer to support our baptism preparation, or join the team who do town-centre outreach? And will you commit yourself not to take a Sunday off when we have a 5th Sunday service, but to make it a priority to gather with your brothers and sisters from across the Parish and come and worship the LORD together? If you have any other ideas, do please let me know!

It is as we give and serve and love and worship God together that God’s glory will be revealed in us and Christ’s Church is built. That’s something truly wonderful, and something our town and villages desperately need to see.

God has called us to fulfil his mission in this place as 1 Parish with 5 Churches. Let’s do his work joyfully and willing together.

Grace and peace,

*Dave*