

## Dear Friends

As many of you might have heard by now, I will be leaving Menston and St John's early in the New Year to take on a new role within the diocese as 'Director of Ministerial Formation and Development.' Whilst I don't want everything that happens between now and then to be coloured by this, I do want to take the opportunity to talk about it a little.

It has been a privilege to be vicar in Menston for over six years. As a family, we have often said that we don't expect to ever live somewhere as nice as Menston again. We have come to love the village and its people and to dearly love our church family at St John's. We will miss you all when we leave in January.

This is not a 'swan-song' article, so what I'd like to focus on is how we look after each other as we prepare for an interregnum. As a short and pithy statement, I can think of nothing better than to commend to you Paul's short instructions in Colossians 4: 2-6:

*2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4 so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. 5 Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.*

Of course, not everything applies – I'm clearly not St Paul, and working for the diocese is in no way parallel to being imprisoned! However, Paul's concerns are that the church in Colossae would devote themselves to prayer, especially reminding them to be thankful and alert. Prayer doesn't just happen, and thankfulness is a discipline to be fostered. A praying church is in a much better position when the future seems a little uncertain than one which fails to pray. As Paul requests, so I ask of you – pray for us too please: for me in my new role that I would be able to encourage others in Christ, and for our family as we move and settle elsewhere.

One irony of being clergy is that we never see our parishes during interregnums. What Paul urges the Christians in Colossae about wise conduct and gracious speech should be obvious and should be our general practice in dealing with each other and with those who are yet to find their place within the family of the Church. We all know, however, that when times are harder, it is sometimes difficult to be as gracious as we would ordinarily. Perhaps this is on Paul's mind as he finds himself writing from a prison cell.

In any case, wouldn't it be amazing if the next vicar of Menston inherited a community who were gracious to each other in good times and bad, who spoke wisely to those in the wider parish, and who were devoted to prayer and thanksgiving!

The way we hope to be during interregnum will only be accomplished if we put those practices in place now. So please, let us in these next few months, practice being a gracious and loving church family, devoted and thankful pray-ers, and lovers of our parish with whom we would give anything to share Jesus wisely and sensitively and yet boldly and authentically.

I look forward to this final stage of my journey with you.

*Steve*