

THE PARISH OF ST MARY, LONG WITTENHAM WITH ST PETER, LITTLE WITTENHAM

It's been a hard couple of years for everybody. Things we took for granted disappeared, new ways of living and behaving came along suddenly, and it wasn't always easy to keep up with the changing rules and regulations.

We aren't out of the woods yet, of course. But a new spring will be coming along soon and it's time to take stock. What have we lost that we'd like to have back? What things we used to live with are we pleased need not come back? New opportunities. New challenges. New life.

At our churches of St Mary's in Long Wittenham and St Peter's in Little Wittenham we've been on the same journey as everybody else. Things have changed for us as well. But, just like everyone else, we are ready to find out what the future holds.

So what are churches for? Why is there a "garish church" in just about every village in England? Churches don't have answers. We have questions. What makes people tick? How does a community, as small as a village or as big as a city, come together so that we can all share in a common good? How do people of different ages share hopes and experiences so all can benefit? How do we, together, support families, individuals young and old, and people who are challenged by life because of ill-health or emotional difficulties? How is everyone, with all our differences of opinion and background, helped to feel at home in our beautiful villages? We think a church's questions are everyone's questions. It is the church's job to give space and time for us all to find answers, for here, for now, for us in 2022.

Now, there's no point not being honest. The Wittenham churches have taken a big financial hit over the past two years. The bottom line is that even survival is going to be a struggle if we can't put some money in the bank over the next few months. A lot of people assume churches get money from the state, or from some other national body. It's not like that. We have to pay our own way and need a minimum of £2,500 a month to break even. The Friends of St Mary and St Peter are very generous, but their charitable status does not allow them to contribute to day to day running costs. Still, we've been here for over 900 years, and we're not ready to pack up yet.

A church can be many things, even if you aren't sure about this God thing. It is a place of quiet and calm. It's a place to think, to cry perhaps, or to say thank you for good things. It's a gathering place too - and we want St Mary's and St Peter's to be places where people can feel comfortable, alone or in company with others. St Mary's is a great place for music and we will make it available for concerts of all kinds, for films, livestream events, whatever people want and can be made to work.

One thing about a church is, we can be a place to try things out, to dream, to experiment, even to fail, then pick ourselves up and start again. So what's your dream for something that would make Little Wittenham or Long Wittenham better places this year? What's missing? Who's being left out? How can we have more fun? How can we care better for older people, for children and young people, for one another? How can you help?

Of course we've got a few ideas - and we're going to list them now. But notice they are questions. They are ideas. Do any of them strike chords with you? What have we missed?

How about? An Eco-Warriors Group? A Baking Club? A Film Club? A Give-Mum-(Or-Dad)-a-Break-Model-Car-Racing-Club? A Memory Cafe? A Board-Game Club? Drama Group? Lego Club? Chat Room? Repair Shop? Arts and Crafts Circle?

What else would you like? And what else could you offer?

So why not join us for a bowl of soup, a chat and an exchange of ideas every Wednesday through March until 6th April from 12noon to 2pm. These Lent Lunches are held at various venues – see the events calendar on the village website.

Being Creative for the Common Good is important to us and we are deeply committed to opening up the church to the community to support a wide range of initiatives.

That, of course, doesn't take away some of the more traditional things that we do and can offer. Churches are places where children (and adults) can be baptised into the Christian faith, or we can offer a service of thanksgiving for the birth of a new child if baptism doesn't yet quite seem right for you. And marriages in church can be a wonderful way for couples to make a public commitment to their life together.

We are always able to offer a confidential listening ear to anyone going through a difficult time, or when families are facing the death of a loved one or coping with a bereavement. If you ever want to talk, the Vicarage has an "open door" policy, and the kettle is always on.

Then there are regular services in our churches and you will find them listed below. Our approach is simple: an open door and a gentle, heartfelt welcome to all, whenever and why ever you come.

Sundays at St Mary's and St Peter's

St Mary's

On 1st, 2nd, 3rd (and 5th) Sundays

Holy Communion with Hymns 9.30am.

This service is at the heart of who we are, expressing our calling as Christians to worship God, to be generous in our hospitality, committed to reconciliation and mutual love. Everyone is always welcome.

On the 4th Sunday of every month we have a service in Long Wittenham at 4pm.

This can take many forms: it may be a simple time of prayer in church (maybe with music), or a walk in the woods around the village, with prayers and conversation, or we might set up in the garden of The Plough, in someone else's garden, by the river or in a wood. Wherever we are, you and your family will always be welcome

St Peter's

At present there is only one service each month at St Peter's, Little Wittenham on the 4th Sunday at 8.30am. It is a service of Holy Communion.

For more information or to suggest ideas, please email bridgegroupvicar@gmail.com or call 01865 407848.

Revd Canon Paul Wignall
The Vicarage
High Street
Long Wittenham
OX14 4QQ