

Morning Praise at St Nicolas

On Sunday 30th August we had a Morning Praise service at St Nicolas, instead of the usual Eucharist. Those who were there and those who heard about it may be wondering why this happened. As the person who was asked to produce this service, I have been also asked to write and explain the thinking.

Why this development?

The Priest in Charge, supported by a favourable discussion at a previous PCC meeting, decided to introduce a Morning Praise in place of the Eucharist at St Nicolas on the fourth Sunday of the month for the foreseeable future. A recent St Nicolas Guild meeting welcomed this decision. There are several reasons for the decision.

Firstly, St Nicolas is sited close to a major proposed new development which will increase the population around the church by several thousands. We need to begin to get ready for this influx, so that we can reach out to and serve those people. Many of us value the Eucharist, and certainly wish it to remain the centre and focus of our worship. I personally believe that in itself the Eucharist need not be a barrier to new people coming to church and to faith. But we also recognise that for too many people attending a Eucharist when you are not used to church worship can be too big a first step. If the Eucharist is the only worship we offer, then we can be putting a barrier in some people's way. We have already responded to this concern by having Choral Evensong and Taize services at St Michael's and Morning Praise at All Saints' – all of which in different ways broaden the worship we offer. Having Morning Praise at St Nicolas is another step in this direction. Of course, Morning Praise in itself may change little; but it is part of getting us ready to be able to engage in mission and service with those who move into the new houses, and there will be much more work to be planned and done in due course.

Secondly, with the coming vacancy there will be three priests and three licensed lay ministers in the ministry team. This parish is very fortunate to have such a team of ministers. All of them give their time freely and willingly, and some have served this parish with faithfulness and devotion over many years. A further non-Eucharistic service once a month will not only broaden the worship we offer; it will also enable our LLMs and clergy to do something a little different. Further, it will reduce a little the pressure on our three priests and mean we do not have to use the Clerical Registry (Rent-a-priest) so often in the vacancy.

Why this service?

When I was asked to produce an order of service, I asked Stephen and the churchwardens what sort of service it should be. Did we want something very close to a normal Eucharist but without Communion, or something from a very different source than Common Worship? They asked me to do the second of these, for the reasons outlined above. The service is therefore largely taken from the Iona Community, a Church of Scotland fellowship based at Iona Abbey off the west coast of Scotland. Their particular style of worship has been developed over many years,

and the wording has a freshness and immediacy which the Church of England liturgies sometimes lack. It is a style which has been much appreciated by many, both to renew worship in their churches, and also to draw in those who have found the existing worship inaccessible.

We aim to use this service for several months, as it will take a little time to get used to it, and then to review it. At that time, all feedback will be welcomed. In the light of that review, we may amend it or possibly try something different again.

Norman Boakes