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**StAG’s NEWSLETTER**

**September/October 2024**

Dear All,

**“And the One who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also He said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” *(Revelation 21:5)***

**“The more things change, the more they stay the same.” *(Jean‑Baptiste Alphonse Karr, French writer, 1849)***

**How many … does it take to change a lightbulb?**

Do you like change? Well, I guess it depends on what is changing! How was it before it changed? Did we like it how it used to be? How is it going to change? Will we like what is coming? What will be the scale of the change? What happens if we don’t like the change? How does change make us feel?

Let’s take one example: we visit our usual supermarket, and they have moved everything around! That would be mildly irritating for some. For others whose memories aren’t what they used to be, and those who find navigating a supermarket difficult – that could be a difficult and unwelcome change.

Another example: a farmer – could be almost anywhere in the world – expecting a certain amount of rainfall now faces more droughts, floods and severe weather. Crop yields fall, even fail. For some, there is no food available to eat; for others, food becomes too expensive to buy. Climate change.

Let us consider political change. The UK has just elected a different ruling party of government whose byword during the election was “change”. How will “they” effect change in the coming years?

In 2017, the North-Western Synod underwent a change in the way the churches are organised. The Missional Partnerships of which all our churches are now a part came into being. As with all church denominations in the UK, how can we ‘do ministry’ with fewer ministers and smaller congregations?

The model of ministry in our Missional Partnership has changed. On 20 July, in a splendid service, we welcomed the Revd. Barnabas Shin and the Revd. Maria Lee as full-time Ministers of Word and Sacrament, joining the Revd. Mark Cowling, the Revd. Dr. ‘frin Lewis-Smith and myself, alongside our Ecumenical colleagues, local church leaders, lay preachers and elderships.

As a new, larger team of ministers, we wish to hear from all churches: their hopes, their needs, their dreams. On Saturday 7 September, the Missional Partnership Steering Group will meet: the representatives will share each church’s vision and discern how the ministers will focus their time.

We would like to urge everyone in all churches to think big, to talk about what they might like to see from the ministry team. Please share your thoughts with your Steering Group representative.

The quotes with which I began this article may cause a wry smile. Lightbulb jokes tend to play on stereotypes. While lightbulb jokes about the church might leave us feeling a little uncomfortable, do they confront us with an underlying truth?

Karr’s quote about change resulting in no change is also a shared experience. A quote credited to Albert Einstein puts it a little more strongly: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” We would like our churches to grow, so…

In closing, let’s turn to the Bible. It’s full of change! In Genesis 1-2, God creates and the created order changes day-by-day. In Genesis, we read about the big names like Noah, Abram/Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Esau, Joseph – we read the changes for worse and for good. Skipping forward to the Gospels, Jesus encountered so many people, beginning positive change in each of their lives.

If we reflect on our own lives, change runs through it: as we grew up, developed careers and families, moved house, said goodbye to loved ones…

Our God is a creator God who has never stopped creating. God re-creates us and the world around us. God re-creates us as individuals, as families and as churches. And we need not be afraid: Jesus’ last words to the Disciples in Matthew’s Gospel (28:20): “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

*Revd. Walt Johnson, Minister in the Bolton & Salford Missional Partnership*

*TH F C dates*

05.09.24 The Barlow, Edgworth

19.09.24 Joan Williams

03.10.24 Victoria Hall Thursday Group

17.10.24 speaker tba

Booked preachers

1-9 Barnabas Shin

8-9 Worship Group

15-9 Maria Lee

22-9 Rev Walt Johnson

29-9 (Harvest) Rev Peter Wightman

6-10 Rev Tony Burnham

13-10 Rev Alan Kennedy

3-11 at Victoria Hall

10-11 Rev Walt Johnson

17-11 Rev Rob Hoch

24-11 Mrs Gill Gasconbe

1-12 Rev Mark Cowling

8-12 Rev Jim Hollyman

22-12 Rev Walt Johnson

25-12 (Christmas Day) at V Hall

 29 -12 Rev Walt Johnson

*Family News* Our congratulations go to Laura and John S as they celebrate special birthdays shortly! We send our very best wishes to Jim MacKinnon, Enid Ashton, Geoff Higginbottom and Tony Edisbury who have all needed medical help recently and hope that they are recovering. Our deep sympathy goes to Kim Day, and Anne Collier and their families on the death of Ron and Neville. We hold them all in our prayers, with love.

*Diary dates -*  Harvest 29th September

Shalom