

From the Bishop of Stockport

The Right Reverend Libby Lane

It has been a privilege for me to work with the parishes of St Mary Stockport, St Thomas Stockport and St Luke Brinnington over the past couple of years. We have now reached the point of proposed pastoral reorganization, and appointment, first of a Rector designate of the new parish, and immediately thereafter of a full time Associate Priest.

I have high hopes and expectations for Stockport and Brinnington, and trust that we will be able to appoint an exceptional priest to lead this re-imagined ministry.

I pray that this innovative appointment, for the Diocese of Chester, will be able to model development of collaboration, partnership, growth, and intentional evangelism and outreach for others in the deanery, borough and diocese.

Together with the Rural Dean, Diocesan Secretary, Archdeacon and Director of Mission, I have travelled with the people of these parishes, their PCCs, licenced lay workers, retired and seconded clergy, neighbouring parishes, ecumenical partners, and other community contacts to a shared vision for a way forward together, as:

*The church in Stockport and Brinnington,
in Jesus' name, by the work of the Holy Spirit,
to the glory of the Father:
transforming individuals and communities,
growing in number and commitment,
resourcing all that brings God's Kingdom closer.*

These churches, in common with others in the deanery, have declining attendance numbers, aging congregations and low under 16 to adult ratios. There are anxieties, of course, about coming together in mission and ministry: questions about buildings, practicalities and logistics. The proposed new parish framework addresses some of the underlying financial and human resource pressures, but concerns remain.

Each of the 3 current parishes, and their congregations, have different strengths and challenges. Their contexts are particular, they have a range of worship styles and theological inheritance.

We see this diversity as an asset, and the churches desire to see every community and congregation flourish. They are growing already in sharing resources, praying and worshipping together. They know that change is necessary, and are more than open to what this re-imagining of church offers for them and the parishes: they are expectant.

While they want to treasure that which is precious to them in their churches, these congregations want to reach those as yet untouched by the church. They want to discern and invest in new initiatives of worship and prayer, teaching and discipleship, social action and partnership. And hope to be a resource in all that to the rest of the deanery and beyond.

There is wide support for this appointment to be significant beyond the three existing parishes. The Local Authority is looking for a key partner in community transformation. Other churches want someone who will help accelerate and amplify Kingdom work already going on locally. Diocesan senior staff and officers are looking for this new parish to provide opportunity for localized resourcing of key work in mission, education, discipleship, training and social impact.

The Mission Department has identified resourcing urban hubs, of which Stockport is one, as a key priority.

It is hoped that the new parish will offer a suitable context for the placement of curates, ordinands, and Readers and Pastoral Workers in training. We would want to explore ways to access additional external grants and funding for buildings and staff.

I am committed to supporting and mentoring this mission and ministry. With the Archdeacon of Macclesfield, the Rural Dean and Diocesan Officers, I will lend my weight to ensuring appropriate resource is offered to facilitate the flourishing of whoever is appointed to be Rector designate for Stockport and Brinnington.

We know that no-one will fulfill every aspect of what might be hoped for in this ministry. So we are looking for a priest who will bring the gifts, experience and strengths they have and resilience, flexibility, curiosity and aspiration to work fruitfully with others to lead.

+ Libby Stockport