

Dear Friends,

I write this little reflection from a strange place where I am saying goodbye to Geddington and Weekley and preparing to move to Orpington near Bromley. As such it will likely be the last letter I will write for this publication. I will miss Geddington very much.

Two of my favourite TV dramas are Fr Brown and Granchester. I grew up quite local to Granchester and so, the TV series, brings back some cherished memories. Whilst these two series are quite different in many ways, one reason why I am so fond of them is their earthy and real depictions of the parish priests, Fr Brown and The Revd Stanley Chambers. Based on real priests known personally by the respective authors, they are accurately presented as floored and damaged pastors, just trying their best to live faithful and honest lives in faith and the pursuit of truth.

Sometimes their scrapes and blunders are excruciating to witness. They are not always liked in their communities. Neither are they always shown the respect they deserve. Often their spiritual and moral reflection on life is not always very welcome, even if it is desperately needed. They stand as timely reminders that being a vicar is a complex and sometimes thankless task, and that parish priests are real people just trying to deal with all the complexities and mess that real life brings. These complexities are only exacerbated when publicly leading a community.

A wider perspective reveals that the same floors are true of the people in their church and village communities too, who bring a complex mix of personalities, social-economic factors and attitudes. Nearly always, it is the conflict between these divergent personalities that leads to wider difficulties and conflicts.

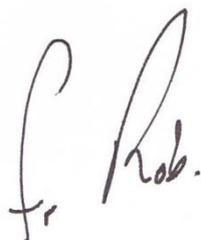
These stories are both set in post-war Britain, a time long before social media, but through them we get a profound insight into just how difficult and complex living in a small community can be. This challenge can seem even greater for us today as modern communications make it ever more tempting to act on impulse instead of first taking the time to think or be reasonable in our responses. Living in a community is a challenge, but we must beware of our temptation towards judgementalism and tribalism. For the good of the community we must resist the impulse to negatively judge those who come from a different social situation to ourselves, those whom we do not know and those who are unlike us.

As a community, St Mary Magdalene Church has grown impressively these past few years in its openness and warmth. It has become a place where all are welcome, no matter what their situation in life. In many ways it has become a community that I am very proud to have been a part of. Our village is also a special place where many people find much joy.

But the changes that life brings can easily push us back into our shells. We must never forget that a healthy community is a diverse community; a community that looks outside of itself. To be a part of such a diverse community, one has to be willing to care for, interact with and get along with the people who are different from ourselves. So to live in community and to contribute to its thriving, takes a really deep level of patience and restraint on our part. It means we have to put others first, refusing to judge them and having a constant willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt. If we can achieve this amidst the turmoil of change, then we truly have a community that we can be proud of.

Go well my dear friends and may God bless you in all you do.

With much love and many blessings,



The Revd Fr R.T.Parker-McGee SR (Priest-in-Charge of Geddington with Weekley)