

CLERGY LETTER

Dear Friends

It probably won't come as any surprise to learn that, at certain times of the year, I spend a tremendous amount of time in church, often on my own, as I prepare for some of the major services of the year. Indeed I can even find myself there quite late into the evening. To be honest, pottering around in church on my own (chatting to God as I do so) is something that I usually enjoy, however the other day I was reminded of an occasion when this definitely wasn't the case.

It happened several years ago when I was still a curate doing my post ordination training. I was studying for a degree and therefore had a number of essays and other assignments to write. On the evening in question I decided to make use of the church rooms in order to finish off an assignment as I was unable to concentrate properly at home. The church rooms at Leigh are a relatively modern extension to the medieval church and are linked to it via a short corridor.

Although I didn't realise it, I probably spent about 4 or 5 hours typing away before I noticed that it had got dark outside and time was marching on. I therefore decided to pack up and call it a day. The only thing I needed to do was return two hymn books which I had



borrowed, to the shelf by the main door (about 30 feet from the entrance that I was using). As I entered the church I was very aware how dark it was, but knowing the building very well, decided that I could find my way without turning on the lights. As I walked up the aisle I found myself thinking "I bet

some people would be really scared by this....I'm glad I'm....." It was at this moment that I realised that I was not as confident about the situation as I had originally thought and I have to admit that I couldn't get out of there quickly enough. However, if I thought that was going to be the end of my fears I was wrong, because just as I reached the church rooms I realised that there was a very strange noise coming from the other side of the door – a noise the like that I had never heard before. If I hadn't been scared before I certainly was now!

So, now I was faced with the dilemma of dilemmas – behind me was an old dark church that, let's face it, had just managed to scare me, while in front was....I didn't know and I didn't really want to find out. I stood there not knowing what to do, I didn't want to go back, but then again, I didn't want to go forward either. However, I knew that sooner or later I would have to open the door and face whatever was there. It seemed like ages before I summoned up the courage to open the door and go in,

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just in time to see my phone fall off the table I had left it on. Graham had been trying to call me but for some reason I had it switched to vibrate rather than ring – the noise I had heard was the phone jumping around as it worked it's way across the table. I have to say that I have never been so relieved in all my life. All I needed now was to summon up the courage to walk through the unlit churchyard back to the car. Thank goodness Graham's call was to offer to take me to the pub!

Well, this little story has got me thinking. How often do we find ourselves in situations where we feel that we are stuck – times when, although we know we should move forward, we are scared of doing so because we can't be certain of what lies ahead of us or how well we will cope, so we try and stay – glued to the spot. This situation can affect us in so many different aspects of our personal, corporate and public life – yet we know that staying put and holding on to the past is rarely the best option.

February brings with it the beginning of

Lent, the time of year when we think about Jesus and the way in which he was prepared to face his fears and move forward – all the way to the cross. It's a time of year when we start to think about his willingness to "step into the unknown", to consider how he gained the strength and ability to do it and what we have all gained as a result.

Our regular Sunday Services throughout Lent will be looking at different aspects of this journey and we would welcome you all to come along and find out more. Alternatively, our Lent courses which take place during the week are open to anyone who might be interested – whether you regularly attend one of our Churches or not. Simply fill in the list at the back of church and I will assign you to a group.

I know that the thought of doing this might feel a little daunting to some of you, but please do consider making this step forward – I promise you we are not at all scary.

Wishing you all a Blessed February.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane". It features a simple, elegant cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.