

# **Prayers for the Parish**

**25<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

## **An exploration of how we encounter the parish through our church buildings**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen:

Father, we thank you for this brief space in our lives to come together and pray for the parish, putting aside the busyness of our day, and offering this time to you. In the stillness of this ancient room, help us to listen for your word and to hear in our hearts how you are working amongst us and how we can respond.

Lord, we offer up the goals of our Mission Action Plan:

- We want to nurture a confident Christian community
- We want to respond to your activity amongst us and in our community
- We want a flexible church space to enable us to respond to your mission

This morning, Lord, we focus on our church buildings: on the church itself and on St Thomas's House, and how these buildings relate to us as a community and to the wider parish; the opportunities they offer us to engage with the parish, and the challenges they pose in terms of our responsibilities of guardianship and upkeep.

The use of the word 'church' to denote both community and building indicates how inextricably the two are bound together. This building is so much a part of our community identity that it is difficult to imagine how we would function without it. But our greatest treasure in this place is the community of faith that inhabits it and which lives out its identity as the Body of Christ in the world today. "The community of faith is the picture, the building is the frame"<sup>i</sup>

Lord, we thank you for this splendid place of worship, which speaks to us of eight centuries of Christian witness by the community which has gathered here in your name. May we so cherish and use it as to uphold that witness in the parish and beyond.

We offer our prayers...

“The community of faith is the picture, the building is the frame”. We want to bring the wider community into the picture, O God, sharing our wonderful building with more of those who live, work and take leisure in Salisbury. The building will always firstly be a theological statement in stone about us, the living community of faith, and part of that statement is about welcoming, hospitality and sharing. We thank you for our Coffee Mornings, Book Stall, festivals, concerts, recitals, exhibitions... all those activities which extend a welcome to the parish and to tourists and passers-by.

Give us energy, heavenly Father, to continue these activities and constantly to seek new methods of encounter with the parish we serve.

We offer our prayers...

We give thanks for the work of the Fabric Committee. They are overseeing £100,000 worth of work this year: re-covering the north aisle roof, urgent repairs and upgrading of the fabric at St Thomas's House, investigating a crack in the Doom painting, assessing the state of the tower masonry and investigating a roof leak, which is causing water damage to one of the precious mediaeval wall paintings in the Lady Chapel. We pray for the Fabric Cttee members: Nick Beard, its Chairman, Duncan Whiting its secretary, Antony Feltham-King our architect, Dermot Hill, who will be project managing a lot of the work, Rob Lewis, Mike Limbrick, who is project managing the St Thomas's House works, Nigel Orchard, Pip Bailey and John Liddiard, our Treasurer.

The work involved in keeping this wonderful piece of local heritage in a good state of repair seems endless and the expense sometimes seems beyond the resources of our small community. Bless the work of Hadrian Cook and others on the PCC looking at the possibility of creating a Friends of St Thomas's, which would be a link to a wider community and might be able to attract funding and support locally, nationally and internationally.

Lord God, this building is important to us as the focus for our worship. May its significance as a central part of Salisbury's history bring practical and moral support from those who understand and appreciate the heritage of our city.

We offer our prayers...

St Thomas's House provides another point of contact with the local community. The Canterbury Room is used extensively by outside organisations and will be in use this week-end for a family party. The upper floor is leased to Sampson Coward, the solicitors. We thank you, Lord, for the working relationship we have with them.

We pray for Lynn and her helpers in the Parish Office. She works in what often appear to be hectically busy conditions, providing a hub for communications within the church and with the wider community. May the plans to farm out some of the work to virtual office helpers take root and reduce some of the day-to-day burden.

Bless O Lord, all who are involved in the administration of our community work; all those who help with the sometimes mundane tasks which keep the wheels in motion; and all those who by being in the office become the face or voice of St Thomas's to people making enquiries.

We offer our prayers...

Work starts next month on major repairs to the roof at St Thomas's House as well as replacing a number of the windows, upgrading electrical systems, installing a fire alarm system, creating a proper Fire Exit from the Canterbury Room and increasing the number of toilets downstairs. This will make the building watertight and bring it up to standard. We pray for Lynn and the other users of the house during what will be a very disruptive period over the summer and early autumn. We thank you, Lord, for the work of Mike Limbrick in project managing this and of Colin Burrows, our surveyor, who will act as Clerk of Works.

We offer our prayers...

But, Lord, there is so much more we could do with a bigger Canterbury Room, both as a parish room for our church community and as a venue for businesses and organisations in the city. At the moment, it is too small and the wrong shape. Extending it into the garden, making it 1½ times bigger and a much more useful shape, would cost around £70,000. Another project for the PCC to consider.

Lord, where are you leading us? How do you want us to develop the community use of our buildings?

We offer our prayers...

The PCC has begun the process of deciding what to do about our organ, which will break down completely unless it is overhauled or replaced very soon. Not only is the organ important in our worship, but it is also another bridge to the community we serve, in providing music and accompaniment in concerts. We thank you, Lord, for the work that has been done already by the organ working group, the independent organ expert and by the PCC. We pray that there will be a good response from the congregation to the invitation to be informed about the options, to ask questions of the PCC and to make our opinions known.

Heavenly Spirit, we thank you for the majesty of music; for the uplift we get in singing as a congregation, or hearing spine-tingling choir anthems. With your guidance, may we find a solution to the organ problem, so that glorious music will continue to be heard drifting across St Thomas's Square to resonate in the hearts of those who hear, for generations to come.

We offer our prayers...

We look at the space we have in the church itself and ask ourselves how it could better be ordered to be more inviting to outsiders and newcomers, to reflect the drama of the Eucharist and other worship and to enable us to use the space more flexibly outside worship for the benefit of the whole parish.

- Does the main West door offer an inviting view in to passers-by?
- Does the entrance make the experience of encountering our community an easy and enjoyable one for the newcomer?
- What impression of our community and its worship is given by the seating plan? Does it suggest active participation or passive observance?
- What impression of our community is given by the arrangement of the principle pieces of liturgical furniture: the font, the lectern, the altar?<sup>ii</sup>

Lord we thank you for the heritage we have been left in this building by previous generations of our community. Help us to see how we can be true to that heritage, yet make the physical environment work better for our worship and your mission, here and now.

We offer our prayers...

So, we have wonderful resources in our buildings, but they cost a lot to maintain and we need to ask ourselves if we are using them to their full potential to further God's mission in our parish.

- We are faced with maintenance costs which outstrip our income
- We need to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on the organ, one way or another
- We need to spend thousands of pounds urgently on upgrading the sound system
- We could spend tens of thousands on the Canterbury Room to make it a better meeting and function room
- Any reordering we might want to do in the church would quickly add up to tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds

Lord, we ask you to be alongside members of the PCC as they tackle these issues in the coming year. Fundraising and drawing in outside support is going to be a crucial part of any plans. In our support for the PCC, give us all a sense of the possible, we pray, and a willingness to discern where you are leading us and how we can best use our buildings to further your kingdom and serve the parish.

We offer our prayers...

Let us finish by looking outwards again from this building and offering to God the businesses named in this week's cycle of prayer for the parish, which are all situated in Fisherton Street:

- Blockbusters, the DVD rental shop
- Curves, the female gym
- Hair and Body Shapers, the unisex hair salon
- Anokaa, the Indian restaurant
- The Asian Food Store
- Splash of Colour, the paint-your-own pottery studio and café

Bless these businesses, O Lord, and the people who work in them.

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We close by saying the Grace together:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Giles, R., 2004. *Re-Pitching the Tent*. Norwich: Canterbury Press. Page 235

<sup>ii</sup> Ditto

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