

Dear friends in Seven Towers,

Welcome to my last letter to you for our Benefice magazine! I have so much enjoyed writing monthly thoughts about life and our journey of faith together with you during my time here, and sharing them with you, and I hope you have enjoyed reading them. I first acquired a love of letter-writing whilst at boarding school as a teenager. I wrote to all sorts of friends (as well as the compulsory letter home that had to be written after breakfast and before church every week on a Sunday morning) and it was a great way to stay in touch and share thoughts and views.

Outside my study window this morning, the girls from Denmark Road School are all queuing up excitedly to get on coaches to go off on trips, so there's quite a lot of noise! I love living opposite the school: I can hear the girls out at break, and lunch, and they play sports on the pitches next to our home. They sit on our wall outside the house as they wait to go home each day and I have an arrangement with the lady who owns a local ice-cream van - at the end of their school day the girls queue up to buy ice-creams – in all weathers – and we've agreed that the van can park across our drive unless I want to go out! All very satisfactory and friendly.

There are one or two challenges with the school, of course. Their burglar alarm goes off in the middle of the night at times, and sometimes the girls return from a trip in the early hours, chattering excitedly about all they have seen and done, and wake us up! Sometimes when there is a school event the street is packed with cars and we can't get ours out (mind you that happens when there's a rugby match as well) And during the summer term I collect tennis balls, which coming sailing across the fence from their courts into our garden!

But on the whole, it works well, each of us respecting the other and allowing for our differences.

Surely this is a model for us here in the Benefice, each of respecting the other and allowing for our differences.

Here is what the Bible says about this:

*"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body, you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father." Colossians 3 v 12 - 17*

This was one of the readings we had at our wedding, but it's just as appropriate for people in a church family as it is for a couple getting married. It's about clothing ourselves with all those good things that come from the Holy Spirit living in us and helping us to be more like Jesus. It's about allowing for differences and faults and forgiving each other. It's about LOVE being the basis of how we live. It's about letting peace be the ruling factor in our relationships. It's about the word of God filling our lives and influencing all we do. It's about helping each other to grow in faith and about singing praise to God! It's about being thankful to God and about everything we do and say being for God.

So, after five and a half brilliant years with you all, I pray that in the continuing months of the vacancy you will take these verses into your hearts and let them influence your life together. God has a new Rector for the Benefice in his plan for you all, and as you wait for that person, may these words inspire and guide you. And I pray God's blessing on you all.

With my love and prayers, *Rev Philippa x*