

What it truly means to be the Parochial church for Warley Woods.

Not a lot of people know this - as Michael Caine might say!

But the word parochial stems from the Greek word paroikos - with 'par' meaning alongside and 'oikos' meaning the household. So, to be the parochial church of Warley Woods means being alongside people or households. How does that make you feel? We are called to be the people alongside people. We are called to be the church alongside people. Not judging people. Not putting up barriers. Not preaching at people. But just alongside people. Essentially being the people of God - who dearly loves us - for the people of Warley.

Seventy years ago, the people of St Hilda's were on the move. On June 29th 1940, just a matter of weeks after the Dunkirk landings, when 300,000 troops were rescued from the beaches in the 'little boat armada', St Hilda's opened for business in its new home in Abbey Road. The congregation carried their chairs down the hill from their old home in Rathbone Road to begin a new life worshipping God and serving the people. They were the people who were alongside the people. In fact, the story goes that 'Canon Mac' (Revd Cyril MacCallum: Vicar between 1930-1959) got the people of the parish to help carry the chairs from Rathbone Road down the hill to the new St Hilda's. One of those was the father of one of our current congregation members - Eric Lewis. Eric is a carpenter. He has done a lot of work around the church. He made the presentation unit for the Book of Remembrance. He is also going to be creating the Vicars' Board, which will be dedicated in September by Revd Michael Dunk, who with Rosemarie, has given it as a gift in our 70th anniversary year.

Back to that word 'paroikos'. It is found in the opening verses of the first letter of Peter to a community of Christians living in what is now northern Turkey (have you been on holiday there?).

At the end of June we celebrated our 70th anniversary with a service. We hopefully (I write this before the event) worshipped both outside and inside - as a prophetic sign that we are people both outside the church building and in. Hopefully, if the weather was kind, people passing would have stopped and even joined in - that would have been very brave. But we **are** people called to be Christ witnesses alongside people - not over and above them or bossing them around.

Peter wrote to the dispersed churches in Turkey to encourage them to be people alongside people and to understand that they were God's living stones - carefully called by God to serve others, even if they felt that they were like temporary visitors and outsiders in their own community.

We have begun to think about what our story means as a people of God in Warley. Some brave souls have shared something of their story in a booklet which Peter Stokes has most kindly compiled. These stories are moving and inspiring and ordinary.

I believe firmly and truly that God is calling us to tell **our** story. For it is in the telling of our stories that we discover truths, come alive and are inspired by hearing them. It is only in the telling of our stories - in safe places set apart by God for the telling of them - that we discover how amazing is God, how incredible is God's love, how sustaining his Spirit, how redeeming is his Son and how true and faithful are his promises.

In the last few months it has been my and Rose Akeroyd's and Fran Ellis's privilege to hear the something of the stories of our baptism and confirmation candidates. Six people - Karen and Kurt Studley, Rebekah and Melanie Mittoo, Marie Powell and Michala Holmes - were all confirmed on June 13th. Marie and Michala were also baptised. What has been so humbling and so inspiring has been the fact that as we drew alongside each other we heard sacred stories of God's dealing in our lives. We learned about prayer and forgiveness and how angry and in need of forgiveness our world is. We discovered that God accepted and loved us as we are because of Jesus' gift of his life. We found out that each of our lives is sacred to God and that God is far more interested in us than we could begin to imagine or believe.

My challenge is this: How can we as a church community find liberation to share and listen to more of our stories and God's story in our lives in the coming year so that we can truthfully and honestly be the people who are alongside people in the coming year?

The wonderful thing is this: I believe that God is true to God's word. God will be the one who draws alongside us and draws us to himself. We just need to remain faithful.

PS. On July 11th we are opening up ourselves to the people and creatures who are alongside us when we hold our first ever Pet Service at 10.30am.

Please come, and let God bless you and your pets!

Paul

