

PASTORAL STATEMENT

THE FRAGILITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND JOURNEY

STRUCTURE OF THIS PASTORAL STATEMENT

As the leader of this benefice, I issue this pastoral statement to draw a line on the past and look to the future. I commit to ensuring that this shall not happen again by using our recommendations as a foundation for change. What I can do is respond to what I see, help establish better management practices, and work towards healthy relationships.

It will be helpful to recall the context, then reflect on this. Then I will highlight what has been achieved since September 2023, when each PCC agreed on four strategic goals. From that learning and success, I will set out recommendations to help us move forward. I will end with my conclusion.

CONTEXT

When I was asked in August 2022 to look at the United Benefice of Bletchingley and Nutfield as a possible post, I was given a clear and accurate explanation of the task of healing a division and leading the churches into growth.

As a priest and evangelist, the latter is within my comfort zone – as you would expect. The former, in my mind, could be a somewhat challenging journey. I chose to train and be formed for ordained ministry at Mirfield, following the Rule of St. Benedict. I drew my guidance from that and opened my mind and heart to heed God's call to come and serve his people across the United Benefice of Bletchingley and Nutfield.

The Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 68: Assignment of Impossible Tasks to a Brother

1. A brother may be assigned a burdensome task or something he cannot do. If so, he should, with complete gentleness and obedience, accept the order given him.
2. Should he see, however, that the weight of the burden is altogether too much for his strength, then he should choose the appropriate moment and explain patiently to his superior the reasons why he cannot perform the task.
3. This he ought to do without pride, obstinacy or refusal.
4. If, after the explanation, the superior is still determined to hold to his original order, then the junior must recognise that this is best for him.
5. Trusting in God's help, he must, in love, obey.

An impossible task can, over time, become possible! Our diocesan and area bishops, alongside the archdeacon, have been crucial in helping me step back and reflect at various points during this journey. The Patrons of both parishes have been mindful of your journey and have affirmed where we have reached thus far. For this, we thank God for his provision as we strive for unity in the journey ahead.

This pastoral statement is not about saying that others before me succeeded or failed; it highlights and celebrates God's mercy and how some found illumination through what has emerged from dialogue. It also illuminates the fragility of our relationships and journey.

When I arrived, amongst the people, there was a lot of fear and/or wariness about talking about the effects of the division. Generally, the division caused hurt, anger and/or bewilderment for some or all who were present during that period. I will honour the confidential conversations I have had with many of you. By entrusting your pain and opinion to me, I was able to discern a pathway to a better place, enable us to draw a line under the past, and embrace the future. Learning and changing are crucial steps in reconciliation and moving on.

Theological Reflection

At the beginning of the statement, I said, “*An impossible task can, over time, become possible*,” “How?” you may ask. Through prayer, listening to each other and leaning into God’s Word. The scripture that has been before me is Isaiah 11:1-10.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

This is what I desire for our churches and communities. I sense you do too. This scripture teaches us to live with more balance and harmony. As a human being, I know myself; I have learnt to live with the divisions and contradictions within me. I feel them arguing with each other, yet I do find reconciliation and peace. The same goes for engaging with people and communities.

Who are the “wolf and the lamb” in our context? Well, it’s going to be different for each of us to answer that. I am sure we can all see some people struggling to get on with others. That is a fact of community life. Each of us should reflect on the wolf and the lamb within ourselves. At some point, our internal divisions and pain that have harmed or continue to harm us, become the divisions and harms between others and ourselves. The internal peace we seek and the external peace we offer are two parts of the same kingdom; you cannot have one without the other.

We should strive to live in that peaceable kingdom, as hard as it is to achieve this. In engaging in this endeavour, we should acknowledge that we should not lay our lives in a manner that hurts or demeans others or indeed ourselves.

God offers us all peace as reconciliation and wholeness. We see this in each service at *The Peace*; it is offered from a “Holy Mountain.” In the Bible, these are places where God or Jesus are at work. Jesus offered us peace in John 14:27. I like to believe that the Upper Room was a “Holy

Mountain.” In genuinely engaging in the peace, we can discover a freedom that allows us and others to become our authentic selves and foster mutual respect. However, it is normal that at some point in our lives, we will struggle to find or give peace.

In conflict, it is not impossible for the wolf to live with the lamb, and the leopard to lie down with the goat. To do this, we need imagination, courage and determination. Isaiah is a top-notch prophet, and he inspires me to engage in ministry with imagination, as we all should! The inference of his words means that if we cannot imagine a life of peace, we end up living our lives in pieces, leaving us divided and broken. Surely, that is not good enough.

Isaiah is not naive, nor should we be, about wolves and lambs, but he is asking us to imagine what peace could look like. The first component to engage in peace is imagination, through which we will discover new ways of living; old approaches are reshaped, allowing our ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking and acting to be transformed.

In part, you are already doing this. Each time we repent, we have the chance to regenerate. The reconciliation journey we have been on has allowed some to change their mind and go in a new direction. For others, they still have to reach that threshold. We all need peace, maybe it's from our past, for ourselves or maybe a challenge we face. Whatever it is, we should all be able to live with uncomfortable differences and yet maintain peace. These things are found in true harmony; the lamb and the wolf can be in harmony while appearing not to change their natures. But then there is hope; like all living creatures, we can adapt, we can live together, not hurting or devouring, without aggression or fear, and without fighting.

As we imagine what adaptation and reconciliation look and feel like, we have to reflect deeply on what we are doing. We have to consider what we are asking of the wolf and what we are asking of the lamb.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process, requiring imagination, in which we think about what we could say to each other; we consider what each needs from the other. We discover what we can offer each other and what we learn from each other. We discover what needs to be acknowledged or forgiven.

Over the last few years, I have seen some of you imagine the wolf and the lamb living together and have been willing to understand the road towards peace. But it's got to move from our heads and hearts to our hands and feet. It has to be realised through achievable action.

Isaiah teaches me that we should take the risk and reconcile. This is the path of peace. Peace isn't something we accomplish or achieve. It's a way of being that orients our lives and guides our thoughts, words, and actions.

Imagine Jesus saying to you, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

STRATEGIC GOALS

I asked each PCC in the summer of 2023 to join me in engaging with four strategic goals:

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| 1. <i>A joyful and worshipping church</i> | 3. <i>Strengthening reconciliation</i> |
| 2. <i>Activities towards growth</i> | 4. <i>Striving towards financial stability</i> |

Basis of the Strategic Goals

The task before me is simple and complex at the same time. My primary role is to listen, challenge and seek resolution if it can be achieved.

Since my arrival some 31 months ago, I have listened to anyone who wanted to talk about the period I term '*The Division*.' When people and groups enter conflict, things often escalate out of proportion. Some behaviours or statements may be justified, others not. People either stay neutral or take a side—it is a natural part of human behaviour. Reconciliation never truly stops; it's a journey to a better place.

A former curate of this parish once said:

"Forgiving is not forgetting; it's actually remembering – remembering and not using your right to hit back. It's a second chance to have a new beginning. And the remembering is particularly important. Especially if you don't want to repeat what happened." Desmond Tutu.

The effects of 'The Division' were experienced differently in our two churches. Generally, it affected how some people felt in church, impacted attendance, and stifled growth. Finances needed to be strengthened, and reconciliation needed to be engaged with. However, I felt that the strategic goals should be the same but with different foci. The outcomes of the strategic goals led me to understand which recommendations I wished to put before the PCC.

ST. MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, BLETCHINGLEY

A joyful and worshipping church

In 2023, some of those attending church told me they felt there was an atmosphere in church, and others felt unsafe. I was not surprised, as it was clear that some relationships had fractured. Since the division, some people have felt they wanted to support one side or the other, while a majority have not wanted to get involved. Some who are new have no idea what occurred.

I agreed on three priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To create a joyful worshipping experience for those currently attending and those returning to church. We achieved this by: (a) Reviewing with the Worship Committee a new order of service with seasonal variants; (b) Moving refreshments from the church into Church House; (c) Restarting an 8 am Said Eucharist to provide an alternative space to worship; (d) Weekly message via email from me.
2. To create a joyful worshipping experience for the unchurched from the village, especially young families, young adults and working-age people. We achieved this by: (a) Creating a new format for Family Service; (b) Positively engaging in the community using occasional services in church or school.
3. To create a joyful worship experience by integrating a children's choir. We agreed this was an aspiration dependent on how we developed as a worshipping community. We hope to run some concerts in 2026/7 to see if we can recruit new members to the choir.

Activities towards growth

To turn the church around, I discerned that we should look outward and engage in growth while continuing to listen to those who experienced hurt or rejection during the division.

I agreed on three priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To share the gospel message of God's love through engaging with children and parents. We achieved this by: (a) recruiting additional leaders for Sunday Club & Family Services; (b) a monthly slot in Bletchingley Village School; (c) developing the relationship with Hawthorns School via Carol Service and some slots in school; (d) supporting the ministry of ARK.
2. To share the gospel message of God's love through continuing to build ministry opportunities for focus groups. We achieved this by (a) reviewing the work of each ministry group, such as, Prayer Group, Blessed Breakfast Club, Ark and Hungry Hermit; (b) planning and delivering discussion groups to strengthen our Christian journey; (c) developing ministry amongst women with groups such as Women Who Wine; (d) for me as the priest to regularly walk the parish and be seen; (e) strengthen our communications via Blechingley Magazine.
3. To share the gospel message of God's love through reviewing our communications via the website and other mediums. We achieved this by: (a) reviewing the Weekly Newsletter; (b) reviewing the parish website and launch new parish website.

Strengthening reconciliation

To change perceptions, I discerned that we needed to grasp the nettle of hurt, misunderstanding, and pain by creating safe spaces for dialogue.

I agreed on three priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To lead people towards healing and wholeness by strengthening trust, integrity and openness.
2. To lead people towards healing and wholeness by offering 1-2-1 and group support.
3. To lead people towards healing and wholeness by listening and learning from the experiences of individual journeys.

This aspect of my work here has been, by far, the most challenging. I have said consistently from the beginning that **I am not here to undertake a review**. It is not my skill set. I am here to **attempt to restore relationships**.

I have seen or heard a lot of "data" from various people; most have retained their "piles of paper" out of fear of reprisal or renewed accusations. Some wanted to bring that data to light and discuss it in a wider context. However, there is a possibility of one-sidedness. There is some substantiation, that is, there is some basis of truth in what is contained in that "data." To try and unravel that journey underneath the "data" that would, in all probability, cause more pain and division, and to what end! What transpired from "the division" and the consequence of words and actions is awful.

In my view, not one person is totally at fault. Therefore, restoring relationships is achieved when people repent, forgive, and move on.

C.S. Lewis says in his book *The Magician's Nephew*: ***"What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing. It also depends on what sort of person you are"***

People's viewpoints are what they are, and over time, it is only natural that individuals' experiences and biases shape how they view the world. Perhaps, pastorally, over time, I can enable those who need to shift and look at something new. I believe this is possible because the PCC and the ministry team were unanimous in their support for my staying. Also, and equally important, everyone with whom I have been in dialogue about the division encouraged me to stay, everyone!

I will say something about how we draw a line on the past in my conclusion to this pastoral statement.

Striving towards financial stability

The finances are managed appropriately. What I wanted to do was to celebrate what has been achieved. We also have to restore our finances and address our dwindling reserves. Nonetheless, I was hopeful that we could turn things around.

I agreed on three priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To sustain and grow the financial viability of the parish by setting a realistic budget. We achieved this by: (a) assessing our finances and setting a realistic budget; (b) agreeing with the above with the Finance Committee.
2. To sustain and grow the financial viability of the parish by communicating our plans to everyone twice a year with a clear ask. We achieved this by sending a personal message from the Treasurer and me to everyone via email or in writing.
3. To sustain and grow the financial viability of the parish by contributing towards our Parish Support Fund pledge (PSF is the payment to fund the priest's post and oncosts in the benefice). We achieved this by: (a) reviewing the Indicative costs for the Parish Support Fund (PSF); (b) assessing the parish's ability to pay; (c) pledging the amount we can realistically afford based on the split of costs 75% Bletchingley and 25% Nutfield: For 2024, we pledged £65k, which was 100% of the request. For 2025, we pledged £60k, which was 89% of the amount requested. For 2026, we pledged £70k, which was 100% of the amount requested.

ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL CHURCH, NUTFIELD

A joyful and worshipping church

In 2023, some of those attending church told me they would like a settled pattern of worship that reflects music at its core. There was a chance to discuss how the division affected individuals. A general restart was needed to enthuse and engage everyone. There was a general expectation that their priest would work with them rather than tell them what to do.

I agreed on five priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. Create a rota of services. We achieved this by working together as a team and encouraging everyone to buy into what we are doing.
2. Maintaining Book of Common Prayer Services. We achieved this by: (a) working closely with the Churchwardens and the Director of Music; (b) reviewing the services with the Director of Music to ensure we are in line with the new Royal Warrant.
3. Developing Family Matins. We achieved this by: (a) building on what was there before; (b) focusing on a new emphasis on linking this with Nutfield Church School and Saturday Connections; (c) making the service fun and engaging. This congregation is now up to 60-70 adults and children.
4. Developing Baptism within the context of Matins. We achieved this by working closely with the Director of Music and carefully merging BCP and Common Worship elements into a workable order of service. The services are a real success and a place of learning for all who attend.
5. Weekly message via email from me.

Activities towards growth

There was a great energy to engage in mission. The Churchwardens, who were new when the division had occurred, leaned into the challenge, maintained things and saw growth.

I discerned that we should look outward and engage in growth while continuing to listen to those who experienced hurt or rejection during the division.

I agreed on two priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To engage with children and adults. We achieved this by: (a) devising a fun and engaging Christingle service. This service has grown year on year and has become one of the mission services of the year; (b) Connect with Nutfield Church School and develop a strong presence in the school by engaging in the governor's duties. Also helping to develop a policy to encourage parents to engage in their child's development by attending church twice a month; (c) lead on Saturday Connections and recruit and develop parents and children there. This service is up to 20-30 parents and children. (d) resourcing and strengthening the choir.
2. Reviewing the church website and launching a new look website;

Strengthening reconciliation

To change perceptions, I discerned that we needed to grasp the nettle of hurt, misunderstanding, and pain by creating safe spaces for dialogue. I agreed on two priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To lead people towards healing and wholeness by strengthening trust, integrity and openness. We achieved this by: (a) publishing PCC minutes promptly on paper and on the website; (b) looking at any management processes that reduce instances of triggering. That communications and actions are open and clear; (c) In general, clear communication in spoken form and electronically.
2. To lead people towards healing and wholeness by offering 1-2-1 support. We achieved this by dialogue using non-recorded private conversations.

I will say something about how we draw a line on the past in my conclusion to this pastoral statement.

Striving towards financial stability

I worked closely with the treasurer to ensure we reviewed the accounts and established a financial reporting model that informed everyone where we are, while also being credible to external funders if the restoration of the building were pursued.

I agreed on three priority actions to engage with this goal:

1. To sustain and grow the financial viability of the parish by setting a realistic budget. We achieved this by: (a) assessing our finances and setting a realistic budget; (b) agreeing with the above with the Standing Committee.
2. To sustain and grow the financial viability of the parish by communicating our plans to everyone with a clear ask.
3. To sustain and grow the financial viability of the parish by contributing towards our Parish Support Fund pledge (PSF is the payment to fund the priest's post and oncosts in the benefice). We achieved this by: (a) reviewing the Indicative costs for the Parish Support Fund (PSF); (b) assessing the parish's ability to pay; (c) pledging the amount we can realistically afford based on the split of costs 25% for Nutfield and 75% Bletchingley: For 2024, we pledged £9k, which was 42% of the request. For 2025, we pledged £15k, which was 67% of the amount requested. For 2026, we pledged £24k, which was 100% of the amount requested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out below will help us to move forward:

1. Policy for Dealing with Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination

The Patrons have wisely determined that what will help to move on from the past is that each PCC agree to adopt this policy: a copy can be found here:

<https://southwark.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/DoS-Bullying-Harassment-and-Discrimination-Policy.pdf>

The policy was discussed at the 10/11 February 2026 PCC meetings and was unanimously formally adopted.

The patrons have been clear that, with this policy in place, they will be happy to present an incumbent.

PRIEST-IN-CHARGE RECOMMENDATIONS

At present, it appears favourable for me to resign in due course as Priest-In-Charge and apply for the post of Rector. I look forward to agreeing on new strategic goals after the 2026 APCMs. However, to continue here, I would like PCCs to consider the following recommendations and, if they agree, adopt them and actively apply them as a progressive way forward.

1. Safeguarding

To strengthen our safeguarding practice by reflecting on the past and regularly reviewing and updating it via a standing item on the PCC agenda. Strengthen vetting by engaging in the latest protocols that the Diocesan or National Safeguarding Teams issue. Develop bespoke safeguarding policies in 2026. Those policies are, but not restricted to: Online safety; Anti-Racism; Vulnerable adults; Domestic abuse; Working with children (to include Sunday Club and Choir); Parish Safeguarding; and Safer Recruitment.

2. Recording and reporting

To record PCC, Standing Committee, and Sub-Committee meetings accurately to enable appropriate transparency. Maintaining the principle of recording facts and not opinions. To publish Reports and Minutes in paper form and online. Some matters will be redacted for confidentiality reasons. In this way, concerns can be raised and responded to quickly to limit the effects of misrepresentation and misreporting.

3. Data Management

Continue to ensure data is held securely on our IKnow database or our Microsoft Business Account. Regularly review who has access to data. Ensure access is removed when someone leaves their Role or Office that requires access to data.

4. GDPR and Privacy

Regularly review our understanding of GDPR and how it applies in the parish context. Regularly review our Privacy Policy.

These recommendations were discussed at the 10/11 February 2026 PCC meetings and were unanimously formally adopted.

CONCLUSION

Division occurs in a church; how you respond and manage it defines your future. No one is totally without blame, as these moments are, by nature, fuelled by anger, frustration and pain. It is very difficult for most people to discover the truth because they hold partial knowledge. The division fractured many relationships, including those within the church and the community. Those with whom I have conversations have their own views on who or what caused those fractures; each view is undoubtedly primarily shaped by anger and hurt. There is also the fact that over time, things distort.

From the outset, I applied my understanding of the process of reconciliation, and an attempt to mend what was broken, involving either:

- forgiving and receiving forgiveness
- letting go and moving on
- acknowledging that some things won't change

A lot has been achieved organisationally and personally; change has happened. Some have let go and moved on. For others, they are in a place where things will not change. I acknowledge this, but that is all.

Taking Responsibility

I have consistently said I am not here to undertake a review; I am here to pastorally restore relationships, if possible. So, the only option is to summarise what I understand from the dialogue and the data I have seen and to acknowledge that some things won't change. As a priest, my job is to somehow hold these strands of pain into some kind of unity.

I have listened to the depth of people's experiences. The very fact that I am making recommendations denotes that the fracture in the relationships and processes led to failure. And those failures caused frustration, pain and anger in many people's lives.

As the current leader of this benefice, I acknowledge this failure and its resulting fracture and apologise. The sad thing is that these failures and fractures were avoidable in their early stages.

Just as Jesus did in John 8, I will now '*draw a line in the sand*', not because it is convenient to brush things under the table. It is because Jesus teaches us that from his compassion, we can put forgiveness over legalism and that we need to look at our own lives and decisions. The church exists because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is always the opportunity for forgiving; it is the only way we can draw a line under the past. I conclude by restating what Desmond Tutu said,

**"Forgiving is not forgetting; it's actually remembering –
remembering and not using your right to hit back.
It's a second chance to have a new beginning.
And the remembering is particularly important.
Especially if you don't want to repeat what happened."**

Reverend Captain Paul T Fitzpatrick CA, SCP – Priest-In-Charge. 11 February 2026.