

To our Church Family

Over the past few months, we have mentioned, in online church, at our annual meeting, and in the weekly notice sheets the diocesan proposal that we join with Medstead Church. As the process moves forward, we (our PCC) want to give every opportunity for all to contribute to the discussion on this. Below is information about the proposal including an invitation to an evening discussion on Monday 12th July 2021 at 7.30pm (at COGS or on Zoom).

Tickets for the building via our website, or for Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87995811959?pwd=MjZaTC9meFZkSDZFY1BoUTVtbUJMUT09>

Meeting ID: 879 9581 1959; Passcode: 626363

What is proposed?

That we be amalgamated with Medstead, becoming one parish under one vicar.

Additionally, across our deanery, it is proposed that Bentworth, Shalden and Lasham, would join Parish of the Resurrection, Alton, and, that two parishes of the Northanger benefice will join, Bentley, Binstead, and Froyle, with the remainder of Northanger being looked after by the current house-for-duty priest.

Why is this being proposed?

In 2019 our diocese began discussions about future deployment and sustainability. With the pandemic we, like many other dioceses and indeed, individuals, businesses, and industries, have found our resources, especially finance, stretched.

By the grace of God and by your wonderful generosity, our own parish has remained relatively stable financially. That said though, this year, as in 2020, we are predicting a deficit. Our diocese continues to experience a significant loss of income, leading to significant diocesan staff cuts and the current plan to reduce by 22 clergy posts. Under the plan our deanery would lose two full-time posts. One of these is already vacant (the benefice of Bentworth, Lasham, Medstead, and Shalden), and the other, the Northanger Benefice (Chawton, Colemore, East Tisted, Hartley Mauditt, East Worldham, Farringdon, Kingsley, Newton Valence, Oakhanger, Selborne, and West Worldham) becomes vacant this autumn.

The specific proposal affecting us has been made because among other reasons:

- As churches we have much to offer each other, complementing each other's strengths and styles.
- We have collaborative civic Parish Councils, and we overlap civic and ecclesiastical boundaries. The civic parish of Four Marks ends at the railway line, but the Ecclesiastical parish of Four Marks incorporates much of civic Medstead, including the whole settlement area from the railway line and up to Red Hill, Five Ash Lane, and Soldridge Road.
- And we even already share a railway station!

What is the process?

We are currently in an informal consultation process and there have been conversations by both Medstead and our own PCC with diocesan staff, including the archdeacon (Ven. Richard Brand) and our area bishop (Rt Revd. David Williams).

It is currently anticipated that as all the deanery proposals impact each other, that they will move through the process together. When it becomes clear that these proposals have sufficient support the process will move to two formal six-week consultations. The first of these is within the diocese, and once completed, the second is with the (national) Church Commissioners. Because of the various

committees involved in this process and the frequency of their meetings, the current forecast is Easter 2022 as the earliest for a completion and this assumes the process moves forward smoothly.

Within this current informal and the anticipated formal process there are opportunities to make comments, encouragements and/or objections to the original proposals. Some have already spoken up about alternative options across the deanery. Comments and discussions are very welcome locally and with any of our PCC. Comments to our diocesan team can also be made now and during the formal process in person, by phone, email, or letter, and are best made to the Archdeacon. Once the proposal is with the Church Commissioners, further representation can be made direct to them.

What does it mean for Medstead and Four Marks?

The key gain for us is being able to partner in mission, sharing our strengths with another church. Medstead has much to offer us, with its more traditional services offering a rich alternative which will appeal to many across our communities. Partnering will bring greater mission opportunities for us both across our teams.

Practically, we would:

- Join as one PCC. This would include:
 - Agreeing a single vision for the new benefice, albeit respecting and maintaining our local distinctives.
 - Amalgamating our financial accounts. Reserved funds in both Medstead and Four Marks will remain restricted for the purposes they were first given.
 - Establishing separate building teams to manage each building.
- Share a vicar and staff.
 - Medstead previously held one service each Sunday, added to our pre-pandemic three Sunday services at COGS.
 - The Medstead parish population is around a 1,000, to add to our around 5,000 in Four Marks.
 - Medstead has a church primary school with 200 pupils, alongside Four Mark school's 300 pupils.

What is our PCC's thinking?

As a team we are enthusiastic about the opportunities. We recognise that this is going to take time, mutual respect, and patience, but are hopeful that the proposed new partnership will result in further growth for the Kingdom of God.

How do I contribute to the discussion?

The Medstead PCC and church members have taken the opportunity to meet with me and some of our team, and we had positive conversations. We now want to give our own church this opportunity.

Any one is welcome to contact me, or any of our PCC to talk through the issues and add encouragements or concerns. In addition, we would like to offer an evening opportunity to discuss the proposals.

You are invited to a discussion evening at 7.30pm on Monday the 12th of July.

Under the current pandemic restrictions, we plan to hold this in the building (ticketed, wearing masks and socially distanced), with facility to join on Zoom.

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Yours Howard