

## Letter from Rev Rachel Sturt

Dear Friends (old and new),

It is lovely to be back in Wrecclesham. (For the benefit of those who have joined the church since May 2016, I used to be the assistant curate here.) I am impressed by the new ventures that have begun and how well you have survived the pandemic.

Jacqueline suggested that I told you what I have been doing in the last six years. After leaving Wrecclesham, I had a short spell at St Alban's Hindhead, and as assistant chaplain at Manorstead (a home for retired clergy), wondering what God had in mind. I thought I was just wasting time. But nothing is wasted in God's economy. In December 2016 I met the assistant to Debbie Thrower (who used to be on TV), and she told me about Anna Chaplaincy, which Debbie pioneered in 2010. I was soon interviewed and began work in Alton. Anna Chaplaincy is part of the Bible Reading Fellowship network and is for older people of strong faith, little faith, or none. It is a pioneer ministry and based in the community.

I found it very interesting to have the freedom to go almost anywhere and be a chaplain in all sorts of situations – the library, the Open Sight Club, Hard of Hearing, lunch clubs, the hospital and all denominations. I will never forget the Nativity play where all the cast were over ninety, stopping a fight during Holy Communion in a care home and going to meetings at the home of Bob Weighton (the oldest man in the world and still living independently until 112).

I was often asked when 'old age' begins. Good question! The older I become the more this figure goes up. In fact, I realised with great excitement that I now qualify for the Wrecclesham Over 60's group!

Many people, including, in the past, me, assume that old age, particularly very old age is just a time of passive waiting. This is sometimes true but often is not. I am amazed by the rich prayer life that some older people have. One 94 year old called it an 'armchair ministry' and still continued until the day he died of Covid. One man came to faith when brought along to the weekly service by another resident who had dementia.

The pandemic has forced all of us to spend time just waiting, just being as opposed to doing. Some have been waiting in fear and isolation. Lent is also a time of waiting. It can be a very fruitful time if the waiting is used to draw close to God. Time spent in silent prayer, in listening, in reading scripture, in returning to God wholeheartedly, is never wasted.

May you be blessed as you journey through Lent.

Love

Rachel