

## Thoughts on Life and Faith October 2017 'Changing World – Unchanging Church'?

As I write this we are in the process of packing and moving after 30 years living in the same house. Life has moved on, our daughter has finished university and is working in London and both our sons are married with children. We really do not need the amount of space we have and are having to make hard decisions about what to keep and what to get rid of. Do we keep the dining table that belonged to mum? Do we keep the old baby clothes? Can keep everything the same when our surroundings change?

But it is not just when we move house that we face change. The world around us seems to be constantly in a state of change. The surrounding culture is changing – whether we like it or not. And some things that worked in the past just don't fit in anymore. And much of this change is outside of our control. Sometimes we just want to hold on to something that provides stability. We want to hold onto something that won't change.

I once saw a church with the slogan 'Changing World – Unchanging Church'. They seemed to think that this was a good thing! But the church cannot be the one thing in this world that does not change! God never changes and God's love for us never changes but the church must change and it always has done. Our lovely old church buildings were once new and they have been changed and adapted many times over the centuries. And the way people worship in them has changed too.

In each of our churches we are thinking about how God wants us to change! We are doing this partly because our buildings have been or will be going through changes - a toilet is to be installed at St Mary's in Thorrington (hurrah!), the chancel and nave at St Anne and St Laurence in Elmstead are to have the plaster reinstated and repairs are to be carried out to the chancel roof. Also some of the seating is to be replaced with more comfortable and flexible chairs (the box pews will remain). St Andrew's will soon have finished paying for the major extension works completed 4 years ago.

But it is not just the buildings. We are also thinking about how God wants us to change because we know that that in a changing world we cannot stay the same.

Our churches will always be places to meet the 'other'. Spaces that are spiritual where we can be particularly aware of being in the presence of something bigger than ourselves. Places to meet God.

And God never changes. His love never changes. He can never love us more than he already does!

As my husband and I move house we are entering a new phase of life with new challenges and new opportunities. That is what our churches are doing too!

So if you are looking for stability in a changing world. Come to church – not because it never changes but because it does change as the unchanging God moves us on.

Rev Pauline Hart