



*A Happy New Year from Rev. Richard and Louise Atkinson*

## PASTORAL LETTER

(From the October – December edition of the Circuit magazine)

Some things are very different. Take rain for example, we are getting used to feeling a couple of drops and then nothing, or gentle showers that last a couple of minutes. True, there have been the occasional bursts of more energetic precipitation which are far more reflective of what we have been used to over the past twenty-one years living in the

Pennines. The thought of rain not always bringing on the drowned rat look has an appeal. Then there is the geography – Skipton was steep hill obsessed. Any journey out of the town centre and there was the risk of some lung-busting gradient to keep you on your toes. The surrounding countryside was populated by sheep with the occasional herd of cows. Our old circuit had no dual carriageways, traffic lights were rare, roundabouts occasional. Now we are getting used to gentle rises, flat passages with hills an attractive backdrop to the huge fields full of produce. There is great beauty hereabouts which contrasts with the glorious vistas we have been privileged to enjoy in Yorkshire. Change is an interesting process; it is part of life whether we like it or not. Some will fight it; others embrace the possibility. I had an aunt who spent her entire life from birth to death living in the same house. She resisted all my uncle's attempts to persuade her to move or re-model the house, and that reluctance to risk has always puzzled me. Their holidays were usually spent in Pitlochry with only the hotel changing when one closed down and they were then able to move somewhere different. She even dressed like she was still living in the 1950s, commenting to my mother about how difficult it was to find an afternoon dress any more. For whatever reason, change was not to be considered, even though she delighted in the more modern houses my parents inhabited and could see the benefits of more space etc. She was a conundrum – like she wanted the world to pass her by and leave her in a time warp of familiarity. In the church we can struggle to set ourselves free from the time warp of familiarity as we strive to cling to how things used to be

rather than embracing the new. It can be seen in our architecture, music, language and expectations. It is almost like we are inclined to fight the way we are called to be. The way of faith is the way of change. Not change for change's sake, not inhabiting the world of fads and passing fancies, but seeking to be ready to follow the prompting of the spirit as we seek to be the church of today, intent on seeking the vision of the spirit as we seek to move in the direction to which God calls. One of my favourite hymns begins with the lines:

O breath of life come sweeping through us,  
Revive your church with life and power;

O breath of life, come, cleanse renew us,  
And fit your Church to meet this hour.

It is a fantastic prayer, as indeed is the whole hymn (391 in Singing the Faith or 777 in Hymns and Psalms) as it offers a powerful reminder that we are to be a community on the move as we seek and respond to the prompting of the Spirit, as we strive to be the followers of Jesus.

Let us hope and pray that we will all be richly blessed on our journey.

Blessings

Richard

Prayer:

Loving Lord, Bring life into our worship that we might praise you more fully Bring hope to our hearts that we might be devoted to prayer and contemplation Bring us peace that we might learn to love ourselves as well as others Bring vision that together we might follow your calling content where necessary to leave the familiar and embrace the renewing journey to which you call In the name of Jesus. AMEN