

Changing Spaces

I recently returned to school to find many changes had taken place over the holidays. New classrooms, created from office spaces, glass pods at the end of corridors and the innovative use of partition walls had all contributed to a clean, organised and space-optimised building.

Each year, the school cohort increases and the building teams spend their time carefully squeezing in more students and staff. The school looks fresh and clean; the only odd thing is that the room numbers are no longer exactly sequential! No one can find F19!

One of the challenges at the start of the new school year is the revised timetables. Students, teachers and teaching assistants are creatures of habit, and getting to grips with new routines is difficult in the first few weeks for everyone. You often meet new students, with their heads buried in their planners, who look up at you wide-eyed, like owls caught in the headlights to ask, "Where is F11?"

I recently spent a painful 20 minutes looking for a classfull of students, checking each classroom floor by floor, only to find they had come up the north stairwell just a few seconds after I had set off looking for them along the south corridor! Eventually, my students and I arrived back at the classroom, hot, bothered and tired, to be asked, "Where had we been?" It was a relief just to sit down!

It is not just buildings and rotas that change, so do we. The past 18 months has caused a profound change in many people. It is only as we are able to spend time with each other that we notice the differences, and have time to wonder, "Have I changed too?"

At work, some colleagues have become more dynamic, some have studied and become new school leaders and some have realised their dreams and moved on to new things.

We also pick up on the changes in our relationships with our loved ones; friendships strengthened or weakened, new friends made and dear friends lost. Our emotional resilience has been tested and, as we approach the Autumn term, many of us have great hopes but frayed nerves.

Our youth organisations have restarted and the joy of this reconnection from the community has been humbling to see. Parents have been happy to stop and chat to leaders about their child and themselves, expressing great relief that their child is taking part in something "normal" again. The children are changed, and so are we, but together we can create new routines and share new experiences which are happy and purposeful again.

We should not underestimate the benefits of having regular meetings with friends and family, sharing in worship and group activities and attending social occasions. We cannot forget that Covid remains present, and we will need to be vigilant, thorough in our planning and constant in our praying.

Each one of us has changed. What we have gained or lost will be personal to us - whether we talk about our experiences will be a matter of choice. What we can do for each other is to be kind; try to be patient; speak less and listen more; apologise and then let it go, and make everyone feel welcome in the house of God. Let us welcome in the new season of Autumn with joy.

"Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God",

Romans 15: verse 7.
Anna Smith