NAVE ALTAR: a discussion paper for the PCC 5 November 2013

**INTRODUCTION**  
  
1.   The parish meeting on 20 October was helpful in a number of ways, not least because it gave people an opportunity openly to express views about a proposed change and to be assured that there was a proper process of consultation in place.  
  
2.    The views expressed at the meeting ranged from some limited support to those who were firmly opposed.   In continuing discussion in the Hall afterwards, the views expressed were significantly more willing to consider the proposed change and ways of preserving the dignity of the High Altar were suggested.

3. The first task of the PCC is to oversee the arrangements for the start of the experimental six month period beginning in January 2014.

**PROPOSALS FOR NEXT STEPS**  
  
3.   It is proposed that the experiment begins on Sunday 12 January 2014, thus avoiding a change being introduced towards the end of the Christmas and Epiphany season.  
  
4.   Many of the concerns expressed on and after the 20 October meeting related to important practical considerations, in particular the arrangements for receiving Communion in a dignified manner.   There was also an anxiety from the choir about their seating arrangements.  
  
5.  It is proposed, therefore, that a small Working Party be established of PCC members under the chairship of one of the Churchwardens to address and resolve these practical issues, consulting with relevant individuals and organising at least one further open meeting, perhaps after church one Sunday before the start of the experimental period.   While this will not satisfy those who are opposed to the idea of a nave altar, it should ensure not only that the practical concerns are ironed out but also, and as importantly, demonstrate that we are firmly committed to proper consultation at St. Chad's.  
  
**EVALUATING THE EXPERIMENTAL PERIOD**  
6.   No thought has yet been given to what is to happen during or at the end of the experimental period. As I said at the start of my presentation on 20 October, we might decide that we want a nave altar always; never; occasionally.   But how are we to get to that decision, or any variant on those options? The process we establish both for the experimental period and at its conclusion is critical.   
  
7.   It has to be a PCC decision and, if the continued use of a nave altar is the outcome, a further faculty will be required.   On a matter as central to the life of the church as this, and on which strong views have already been expressed, the consent of the congregation is also vital. That can be achieved only by continuing engagement with all shades of opinion within the congregation.  
  
8.   It is proposed, therefore, that the Working Party suggested in para. 5 above continues to meet and to report each month to the PCC both on reactions to the nave altar as the experiment continues and on its emerging thinking about how further consultations can adequately take place which will inform the final outcome.   It is likely, and highly desirable, that during the six months of experiment various approaches will be tried, reflecting comments that are made and in response to experience built up week by week. The priest-in-charge and Readers should be seen as a resource to assist the Working Party in its deliberations and developing thinking.   
  
9.   A progress report and outline plan for consultation towards the end of the experimental period- perhaps in the form of a questionnaire and a further parish meeting- should be made to the APCM.  
  
10.  Every effort should be made throughout this period to avoid outcomes being seen as 'victories' or 'defeats'.   The debate is about our worship and the best use of our church space and how we might enhance the central act of weekly worship which brings us together as a congregation.  
  
John Milner  
25 October 2013