



## St. Mark's Church Community Centre, Bedford

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For information to Clergy Bedford Deanery

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Many of you will already be aware of the changed situation regarding the ecumenical relationship between St Mark's Church and Putnoe Heights. The note below gives some of the background to these changes and outlines how the churches will worship and operate moving forward, especially with regard to Anglican involvement in worship at Putnoe Heights, which I would ask you to note.

St Mark's and Putnoe Heights have each operated as Anglican / Methodist ecumenical churches for many decades during which time the churches enjoyed joint common liturgies and worship as authorised by the Sponsoring Body. Over the past few years the Methodist Circuit has considered it important to implement changes to ministry and worship in order to differentiate the Methodist tradition from their Anglican partners. This was a very different model of ecumenism to that which has existed in the past. In response to the changes and model of partnership St Mark's Church decided three years ago that it wished to withdraw from the ecumenical agreement and has since then been operating separately as an Anglican parish Church.

At Putnoe Heights, for the past two years there has remained an ecumenical partnership, however the denominational segregation insisted upon by our Methodist partners became increasingly unwelcome for the majority of the congregation. The Anglican clergy were asked to be absent from church services fortnightly to enable separate Methodist worship, and lay led worship to take place. Constitutional changes were also put in place in which the Anglican clergy had stated they would be unable to participate. As a consequence of the changes, the PCC of St Mark's Church agreed unanimously that there was no alternative but to formally withdraw the Anglican Church from the partnership and sharing agreement at Putnoe Heights.

Putnoe Heights Church is within the parish of St Mark and it has been agreed with the Chair of the Methodist District and the Bishop of Bedford that no Anglican involvement should take place at Putnoe Heights whilst it establishes itself as a solely Methodist place of worship. After an initial period of a year an invitation may be made for Anglican involvement in a service, however this may only take place with the agreement of the incumbent and PCC of St Mark's Church.

We continue to pray for all of those who have felt a sense of loss following these changes, especially members of Putnoe Heights Church. We continue to offer to them ongoing pastoral support and many have decided to worship at St Mark's. We recognise and share the feelings of sadness and loss of those who have been affected by the changes and the drawing to a close of a partnership which has existed for over forty years.

We now look to the future and the flourishing and growth of both churches and congregations in their respective worship, mission and ministries.

Charles Royden

