



## STATEMENT

Regarding a right of way through the Churchyard of Saint Michael & All Angels Church, Barnes.

Dear Parishioners,

You may recall that last year an application was made to Richmond Council to make the path through the Churchyard between Elm Bank Gardens and Charles Street a public right of way. Saint Michael's opposed that application because access to the churchyard, at nearly all times, has never been called into question, and we saw no reason to change the long-standing status quo. At that time, Richmond Council found against the application. The applicant subsequently appealed the decision to the National Planning Inspectorate and an inspector has now overturned the Council's decision and asked the Council to re-designate the route through the churchyard as a public right of way.

I would like to pay tribute to Saint Michael's which, over many years, has given general access to the public to use the churchyard as an act of generosity and kindness. For this reason, the application has been a cause of sadness to the Churchwardens and me, as I know it has been for so many of you. It is such hospitality, given freely rather than by compulsion, that binds us together as a loving community in service to one another and in witness to the generosity of God.

Unfortunately, as a result of this decision, churches across the country may now have to be much more cautious about the access they offer to the community, in order to avoid similar applications. This is a significant and lasting change to the legal status of our churchyard, and it is unclear at this time what the financial and administrative consequences will be for us and especially for those infrequent occasions when it is necessary to close the churchyard for maintenance of the church building and grounds. We will be working with the local Council and the Diocese of Southwark to discover what action now needs to be taken, in what timeframe, and the implications this has for the whole parish and wider community.

I would like to thank those members of the PCC who have spent a great deal of time and energy in responding to the application and the appeal, which was considerable. I believe it was right for us to oppose the application and thereby uphold the importance of generosity and voluntary hospitality. My thanks are also due to the large numbers of you who have expressed your support for Saint Michael's throughout the process.

Father Stephen Stavrou (Vicar)

*On behalf of the Churchwardens and PCC of Saint Michael & All Angels, Barnes.*

*Feast of the Baptism of the Lord*

12<sup>th</sup> January 2020