

Vicar's Address 2010

Much of what we say at an Annual Meeting is retrospective, it can even be difficult to remember some of the details of the past year as we are so engrossed in what is happening now. And yet it is an important exercise to sit back and assess what has taken place and where we are going next.

It is important to say thank you to all who have given so much of their time, energy and love to this church, this worshipping community, this building and this wider parish.

Two vicars in 36 years. Two men whose ministry has shaped how many of the congregation we have today have grown in faith. In 1973, the year Gordon Martin was made Vicar of St John's was also the year of my birth. In 1997 the year in which Jonathon Smith was made Vicar, I took up my studies at theological college. It is relatively rare in the modern church to have kept your vicars for so long. My previous parish, such was its nature had a new vicar every 5 – 7 years. They were most definitely used to whipping them into shape.

In 2009 I finally made it to long trousers and joined the esteemed crowd whose names are painted on the board at the back of our Church. Wardens and Ministry team breathed a sigh of relief. Vacancies always present a time when team work and collaboration are needed most. And this has most certainly happened.

My heartfelt thanks go to those who took such good care during the vacancy. To our Ministry team, both lay and ordained. Your dedication to leading worship and pastoral care is a great asset across the community.

To our wardens and deputy wardens, Ian, Matt, Margaret and Lesley have been, and continue to be in their very distinctively different ways excellent wardens. They have complimented each other, worked closely together and have given unstintingly of their time and skills. Being a warden is not always the easiest and most glamorous job. The buck can often stop with them if something is left undone. All of them have busy lives, and it is not only St John's who gain from their endeavours.

To Susan, our Parish Secretary, who has held my hand on a number of occasions, and given me much valued information and advice.

Our PCC and its officers and sub committees have met with great regularity, and as well as carrying out their duties with care and diligence, there have also been the opportunities for discussions.

My thanks for all the efforts that have gone into chairing these committees bringing good suggestions and feedback to the PCC. I think it is important to reiterate the point that by electing these officers to the Parochial Church Council, you elect them to represent the wider congregation and community.

Many people quietly and efficiently help in many different aspects of the Church. My thanks to the servers, sidespeople, lesson readers, leaders of intercessions, flower arrangers, those who serve coffee, those who clean and tidy both inside and out. All of these people make coming into our Church and Hall a more pleasant and welcoming experience.

The report booklet is full of good news. Much of what goes on behind the scenes and in front can easily be taken for granted. However, the sheer amount of work and effort that goes into this worshipping community is of vital importance and without a team effort we would be much poorer both spiritually and in some cases financially. We do need to be aware of the challenges that face us in the present economic climate, and we do need to keep looking to other ways to help us reach those targets. However if we continue in good heart to work towards and beyond our financial goals trying our best, we are heading in the right direction. Stewardship is an important part of our Christian discipleship and most remain so.

For it is people; God's people that we live and serve amongst. It is our duty and our joy to serve in this community. The ministry of occasional offices, of Baptism, Weddings and Funerals is important. It is an opportunity to bring people closer to God, and to encourage them on their Christian journey.

It is at this point that we remember with love those who were members of our congregation but are now rest in the nearer presence of God.

Professor David Morley

Iola Leckie

Alan Gardner

Sheila Griffiths

Elizabeth Dodd

Cyril Pease who died this past night

All of these occasional offices act as a reminder to us all of the pastoral responsibility for the whole parish and not just the congregation. These offices take up a huge amount of time, and in many cases, energy. Yet they are a source of inspiration, dedication and sometimes perspiration! Worship is at the heart of any Christian community. Without a congregation, regardless of the building or the institution we would simply not function.

My thanks to Roger, along with the choir; for their leading of the music in worship. It is an important part of our worship and their efforts are greatly appreciated. Our Junior Church and Creche is an immensely important part of our Christian nurture. We have a responsibility to help these children and young people grow in faith.

Our greatest priority lies in bring people closer to God. We are also given so many opportunities, not just those of us who dress up in funny clothing, but each one of us.

I hope that I continue bring enthusiasm and excitement, an enthusiasm for the love and compassion offered to us in Jesus Christ, a love and compassion that we have a responsibility to share.

We look forward today to a new year of encouragement towards spiritual growth. Yet with this comes a sense of vulnerability. WE must continue to look closely at what we do, to understand the needs of this community, the needs of God's world. As we worship together, pray together, socialise together, may it always be with our faith at its heart. We can see the changes in the Church and in society. These are not problems but challenges. Challenges that we can face together, with vision and enthusiasm. We pray and seek God's guidance as we continue to worship and work together. We need to encourage one another, as a witnessing community to live our faith not only in our church but our homes and places of work.

I am of the view that much of what we do as a church is about relationships. With God and with each other. I have spent a lot of the last few months looking and listening. Hope to gain a better understanding of who and what St John's church is about. I'm certainly not declaring that I now have all the answers but it has certainly helped me understand more about the parish I am ministering to. This will continue. 2010 has started with great gusto, I hope that each little step we make as we meet and greet people in the name of

Christ will be to the strength and glory of this Church and the Kingdom of God. There will be change ahead. Looking at our liturgy is a goal for the next twelve months, enriching our worship and keeping it energised is of great value. As the wardens have already highlighted we have to make some very clear plans about our fabric. We need to look at how we view Christian education and discipleship and what we can do to make a difference. For me the last seven months have been something of a roller coaster ride. It possibly has been for you too. They have been interesting, they have been challenging, and they have also been encouraging. It has certainly been a time of transition for all of us.

But once again I say thank you, to all those who have worked so hard, named and unnamed. And to all who will work hard in the years to come. We move forward in faith, putting our trust in God.

Philippa Segrave-Pride
April 2010