

The Vicar's report to the Annual Church Meeting 2011

What a difference a day makes, or so the song goes.

The morning after our last APCM when the question of whether we are still a training parish was raised, and if we weren't going to have a fulltime curate perhaps we should look at selling the Curates house, a letter arrived from Diocese inviting me to consider have a full time curate. That seems to have been a marker for how the past twelve months have gone.

In my first Annual report here, I remember talking about the privilege and the responsibility of being entrusted with the incumbency of this parish, of being your vicar. And I'm frequently reminded of both of those very important words: the privilege of being here and of sharing in the Christian life of this community, and the responsibility that comes with that privilege, to use the gifts God has given me, to be faithful to God's calling, and to be accountable to God for my ministry here.

But those two words apply to all of us, the privilege and responsibility of being members of God's church here in Harpenden.

The responsibility to be faithful to God's calling, to use our own gifts in his service and to realise our own accountability to God for our part in church life and ministry.

To know that who we are and how we live, the quality of our relationships and the integrity of our words and actions, have an impact for God's mission here.

Put that way, it can seem a daunting prospect, but we don't do it alone, and we don't do it in our human strength.

We are members of a community which is here to help and to encourage each other. And we are resourced entirely through our dependence on God.

So we also acknowledge the huge privilege that it is to be part of this church, to be part of the people of God in this place. To be part of our outreach and our engagement with our local community. To share in building up those who are new to faith, and in supporting each other at whatever stage of our faith journey.

~I have purposefully been asking a lot of questions, building on those early months as your new incumbent. Even without being new, it is helpful periodically to come back again to the fundamental question of

‘what is the church here for?’ What is the aim and purpose of our life together?

Why is it that we need money and volunteers?

What are all the meetings about?

You might dismiss the question, thinking it’s too blindingly obvious. Clearly we’re here in some way and for some reason because we are Christians, and Christians ‘do church’, don’t they?

Our Ministry Team, Standing and PCC had to face me asking a huge amount of questions about Pastoral care, their attitudes to Stewardship, Outside Giving, and a whole range of topics as I build a better picture of where we feel we are being led as a church. Our audit of the congregation on the back of the Bishop’s sermon has helped get a wider perspective of how you all view what we are doing.

Our Bishop is encouraging all the churches in the Diocese to Live God’s Love, again it sounds a bit obvious, shouldn’t us Christians be doing that anyway?

The simple answer is yes, but we need direction and we need guiding.

So what is St John the Baptist Church, Southdown all about? That’s something we’ve started looking at and will continue to look at over the next months, spearheaded by a small group from the PCC and the ministry team.

What is our purpose here in Harpenden in 2011? Where is God leading us in our journey with him? What are our priorities in our mission here? How do we hope to achieve those and what are the resources, in spiritual, physical, monetary and people terms that we need in order to further those priorities in mission and ministry?

The year ahead will doubtless bring its challenges and changes, and I think we are generally in a good place to face those challenges.

There is a good sense of people working together in many areas of church life, and the following are just a few examples.

We have been learning and sharing our faith together with our Lent Groups, Spirituality morning, Quiet days, our Men on Wednesdays group, the reigniting of the fellowship and study group. As well as looking at plans for more learning together during the year.

We have fourteen children signed up to start their preparation for Communion before Confirmation and we already have adults asking about our next confirmation group.

Amanda Duncan will join us at the beginning of July as full time training curate. This is a privilege and a responsibility to help in her ministerial formation.

We continue to support Lucy in her training, and we are keen to listen to anybody who feel they are being called to serve God, please do come and talk to us.

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.

Renne Grieveson

Pat Quinn

Brian Tweed

Joyce Groom

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!

So what are some of the challenges? Work on the church roof looms large, and my thanks to the fabric committee for all of their efforts so far with this project.

We need to look further at how we engage with those on the fringes of the church, and those with whom we have occasional contact. We hope to make a concerted effort to establish our Pastoral committee which will help us with our communication, both within the church and the wider community.

Our Mission Action plan, part instigated by the Bishop, but also building on a process already started will help us set some goals as to what we can achieve step by step.

Much to be achieved and much to be thankful for.

It is important to say thank you.

To our Ministry team, both lay and ordained. Your dedication to leading worship and pastoral care is a great asset across the community.

I say a big thank you to our wardens and deputy wardens, Matt, Margaret, Ian and Lesley have been, and continue to be in their very distinctively different ways excellent wardens. Thanks too to the other members of our Standing Committee, Liz our secretary and Anthony our Treasurer, especially. They have complimented each other, worked closely together and have given unstintingly of their time. We sometimes have to make difficult decisions, and we don't always get it right, but we Do try very hard to represent you our congregation and community.

To Susan, our Parish secretary, who has held my hand on a number of occasions, and has continued to give 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, again trying to reflect the needs and views of the wider church family and community. My thanks for all the efforts that have gone into chairing these committees bringing good suggestions and feedback to the PCC.

To Roger our organist, those who share in ministry to children and young people; all the leaders but especially to Margaret and Alison as they prepare to hand on the baton for Junior Church

Many people quietly and efficiently help in many different aspects of the Church. My thanks to the servers, sidespeople, the choir, 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. This work is not to glorify our buildings or ourselves, but to help St John's be a vibrant, worshipping community, Living God's Love in all that we do.

Thanks be to God.