

Rector's Review 2024

Annual Report & Accounts - St Mary's, Linton



Looking back on 2024 is a good and healthy thing to do. There has been much to be thankful for in the life of our church family and our parish. Beyond our Linton Parishes and Deanery and Diocese, the Church of England is sailing through choppy waters. Too many lives have been blighted by an institutional mindset and secrecy of too many people who have failed to protect the vulnerable and address abuse. The political wrangling of those who wish to split from the Church in the likelihood of same-sex blessings will have consequences for all dioceses in the coming years, too. How easy it is for us to forget Jesus's prayer that we 'may all be one' (John 17:11). We are, after all, 'the Church' and there is no use in blaming Bishops if our neighbours don't see Christ's light in us or find us unwelcoming.

For it is in the grassroots that the Holy Spirit is most evidently at work, not least through many of our church family who have given so much in the year under review. I want to thank our Churchwardens, David and Charlotte, for all they have done for us and the wider community. As Charlotte steps back as warden, we appreciate all that she has given to our church life and wish her well for this next chapter for her and for Tom and little Theo. During the year, Nicola Collard completed her time as Chair of Governors at Linton Infant School, having done so much for that wonderful little school, and Gill Powell retired from her role supporting Baptism families. They will both be missed. Since the year end, Sarah Thorne retired as Children and Families Minister after years of supporting young people and their carers in the parish with such thoughtfulness, imagination and dedication. Thank you, Sarah (and John) for all that you have shared with us.

It has been so good to see David Parry-Smith recover from serious illness and lead our music again, and the choir is flourishing. We are all deeply grateful to Tom, Jacqui and other friends who led our music while David was recovering. The choir's contribution to our worship is much appreciated, as is the ministry of our bell-ringers, cleaners, welcomers, flower arrangers, the Monday Gang in the churchyard and those who ensure our building is open every day of the year. Through the generosity of our Ministry Team – not least Michael, Lesley, Cathy, Sarah, Nanette and Jacqui – we have continued to offer a healthy range of worship through the year, and numbers of people joining us on Sundays and special occasions have increased. Almost 200 people attended 'Linton Remembers', our community Remembrance Day service – including many young and pupils from the Infant and Junior schools, who took part in the service - and attendance increased at all our Christmas services. (Our village Carol Service over 230 people of different ages and backgrounds).

The three Root & Branch (RnB) groups have continued to meet through the year, looking at the forthcoming Sunday's Gospel reading reflectively and sharing questions, friendship and life experience. I am grateful for these friends sharing the journey and our learning together. Thank you. Since Lent this year, a fourth group has been established at Shudy Camps, too.

As in all living things, some things have changed. This year we said thank you for 'Space for the Spirit', an online time of reflective worship prepared with much thought and imagination by Molly, Gill and Helene. We also saw the launch of our 'Service for Hope and Healing' in the Autumn, and which continues on a bi-monthly basis. It has been a joy to welcome new friends to our congregation, too. We continue to make progress with tidying the clutter in our building and look forward to new projects – such as a new welcome desk – made possible by the generous support of the Friends of St Mary's.

But the Church, above all other human organisations, is not called into being merely to look at itself:

'Looking up to heaven, Jesus sighed and said 'Ephphatha!' ('be opened!') and immediately the man's ears were opened.' *Mark 7:34-35*

We are being healed, so that others may also know life. Most of those others can't or don't come to St Mary's on a Sunday. (Or feel good enough for God's love).

Having looked back on another fruitful year – in all sorts of ways - what are the cries in our parish that God wants our ears to be opened to? How is the Holy Spirit calling us to respond together? Not just to respond with the people we like, or we agree with, but **together as one** church family. It really isn't about which service we go to, or the music we like, or our pet projects, but how much our heart is in harmony with God's heart. Together.

Looking to the rest of the year, may we have ears to hear what the Lord is calling us to do, together. Not least as we discern the way ahead with our welcome and nurturing of young people and their families. More prayer is needed, and courage. Not only to pay our way, or to keep our building open, or to keep services going – important as these things are. Our greatest challenge is to hear the needs of people around us, here in our community, and to do something to help them, in the power of the Holy Spirit who gives us life.

Revd Paul

Team Rector of the Linton Parishes

APCM 11th May 2025