

## RECTOR'S REPORT TO LINTON APCM, APRIL 28<sup>TH</sup> 2019

It has been another busy year, but one in which patterns set in previous years have been continued, stressing the themes of hospitality and welcome in life of the church. An innovation was our Scarecrow Festival, which was a huge success, particularly in involving the wider community. We hope to repeat that experience this year. The Events Committee also pushed out the boat with two major entertainments involving Christian entertainers well-known nationally, Jonathan Veira, Paul Kerensa and Jancis Harvey. These, too, proved appealing. These events, together with a host of other occasions, when we've been extremely well-fed and shared fun together, add to our debt of gratitude to the hard-working members of the Events team.

Sadly, among these events was our 'farewell' to Nicola Bown, who left rather earlier than expected because of new ideas about the need for curates to do extended placements elsewhere. I was very grateful that she was still around in September and October, enabling me to have my Study Leave, but rather shocked to learn how little time she would be staying after that. We wish her well as she continues in Great Shelford, and seeks a post suitable to her and her family to go to when her time there finishes. I am sure many of us remember this in our prayers, as this is an anxious time for them all.

On the subject of my Study Leave, I would like to thank everyone in the parish who honoured that so generously, and didn't try to involve me in anything, although I was still in Joiners Road. Also, particularly, Joan Smith who aided me in my task for sorting out Stephen Sykes' papers very generously.

Whilst it has been difficult in some ways to lose Nicola's assistance, it has been very good to see Sarah Thorne flourishing both in her LLM course and in taking on the leadership role of Children and Families work. It's also good to know that John Thorne is enjoying his theology course, whose benefits the parish will no doubt share when he finishes it in a couple of years' time. We continue to develop and experiment in order to serve the Lord's kingdom better in this field – Messy Church is moving to a new timing, to see if it encourages more families to attend, we have started our non-Eucharistic All Ages service, 'Together with God', once a month under Cathy Watts and Nicola Collard's leadership, and it's going well; we are continuing the practice of involving young people directly in the All Age Eucharist, as inspired by Nicola Bown, and those of us who lead Tots in Tow are pondering and praying about developing a new ministry to the parents and carers out of – something more specifically directed to the adults and their needs, and perhaps with a more intentional faith-sharing content. Watch this space! Unfortunately, Wild Church has had to stop as there were not enough of us to lead it and to carry out the exciting activities we would have liked safely. However, around the same time, we have started a monthly Youth Group (SMYG) for those over 9 in our church community, with help from YouthInc, or deanery youth project. This combines games with Bible discussion, and seems to be meeting a need. I hope that when the deanery youth worker, Rachael Went, moves on to start a new group elsewhere in the deanery, Michael Wilcockson, with his huge experience of helping young people reflect on faith, will be able to take it on (with help, of course!)

The Beacon Youth Trust continues to serve the young people of secondary school age in the village, and has an increasingly warm relationship with the Parish Council, which has agreed to make its grant on a triennial basis instead of an annual one. David Watts generously joined the Trustees during my time on sabbatical, and has agreed to continue as a trustee into the future. He joins me, Hugh Paton, and Hannah Foote from St Mary's. Unfortunately, Lee Nash moved on in the summer, but with a new partnership with Romsey Mill, and an excellent part-time paid youth worker, Stella Blakeley, the work has continued. Unfortunately, however, the specifically Christian youth activity it runs on Friday nights has rather waned since Lee's departure. We look forward to the appointment of a new full-time youth worker, to be employed and managed by Romsey Mill in partnership with the Beacon Youth Trust, and hope that this aspect of its work will take on a new lease of life, and once again involve people from St Mary's. Meanwhile, Sue Filby continues to contribute importantly to the 'Girls' group, which is undertaking a new project called 'Shine', to help teenage girls with self-esteem issues.

I mentioned earlier, in relation to Children and Families work, a hope of doing something which has 'faith sharing' with those who do not share our faith actively at its heart. This idea of 'intentional' faith-sharing lay behind our Lent course, in which four groups took part, using a book called –'Sharing Faith the Jesus Way'. Although the numbers involved weren't huge (though the group led by Sue Filby at Nichols Court was quite substantial), I think that all who took part found it interesting and feel inspired to try to be more open about God and the Gospel with those around us, in appropriate ways. With this little bit of inspiration, and the foundation of a monthly prayer group, I hope we are creating conditions in which our ministry of hospitality and welcome will be built upon effectively to make new disciples, not relying upon the clergy alone to be the ones who speak explicitly of faith. (Other people are probably better at it in many cases, anyway!) We shall focus on this hope once again during the 'Thy Kingdom Come' season between Ascension and Pentecost.

I have mentioned Nichols Court: this is one of our 'growth points' – like the Thursday Communion services, the Nichols Court Communions on Mondays have very respectable numbers – even growing congregations. In all our efforts for children, young families and youth, we must never forget our mission to older people, and the growth we can hope to see there. The Symonds House congregation fluctuates, but our services there are still much appreciated, thanks to Michael and Glynis Younger. So, it's not only in high-octane activity that we can reach out: I am so glad that 'Space for the Spirit' is continuing as a lay-led worship ministry, with reflection and quietness at its heart. Thank you to Molly, Gill and Colleen for all the work that goes into this. Equally, I am grateful to all those involved with the Peace Garden, which was officially opened a few weeks ago (although already well in use by villagers). Please do volunteer if you can, to help in its upkeep as a place of quietness and reflection. We are registering it with 'The Quiet Gardens Movement', which may encourage people to come from away to spend time there and in our church for personal quiet days., etc., using the facilities of our Pavilion, too, (so ably managed for us by Hilary as far as bookings and cleaning go).

Music continues to be an important part of our church life, and we are very blessed in David Parry-Smith, both for his skill, versatility and for his deep Christian commitment in what he does. Few villages have such an excellent musician at the helm. I know he would want

Anne to be mentioned, too, whose administrative skills and support enable the choir to function. The choir has had a few more members this year among the male parts, for which we are thankful. The Music Group has shifted from All Age Eucharists to 'Together with God' as its main theatre of operations. We are very grateful to Russell Taylor and Jacqui Burge for alternately playing the keyboard for it, and to John Thorne for playing his guitar, but we are praying for someone to join us with the requisite skills and time to give to overall leadership of this group, so that it can develop further. It would also be lovely if we could find a way of drawing children and young people more into our music-making, although we have really enjoyed contributions from the schools at our big services this year, including the Infants' School choir leading us in 'Jerusalem' at the very large centenary Remembrance Day service!

I mentioned last year hopes of various material ways in which we could move forward with our Mission Action Plan. These included a new external noticeboard, which has now been ordered. It will bear prominently our new 'visual identity' ('logo' and preferred lettering, to the uninitiated) designed for us very generously by Simon Lee and Gill Fraser- Lee. Huge thanks to them! It should make quite an impact in the churchyard, as well as (at last) having space to pin up topical notices on that crucial pedestrian route. Some of our other hopes for the church – eg. new music stands for the choir, a cupboard at the back by the door, and a kitchenette in what is now the boiler cupboard – have yet to materialise, illustrating the difficulties of negotiating appropriate designs and applying for faculties. But we hope to see movement on these things within the next year, as well as fulfilling the recommendations of our last Quinquennial Architect's Inspection, and making progress on some possible plans such as, perhaps, to move the organ around by 90 degrees, and nearer to the congregation and choir in the north aisle. This will give us a good steer on what we should do to improve our lighting, One thing inevitably involves another – and the Diocesan Advisory Committee is keen that we should have an overall vision of what we want to do. Advice has been sought through a diocesan project as to how we should be 're-imagining our building' in order better to serve the community. My one fear is that the stress on envisaging the whole may delay us in achieving those parts about which we are already clear about our need - we are desperately short of good storage space in the church, for example, and the organ needs overhauling (which could be done in conjunction with moving it), whilst I, personally, ache to be able easily to make coffee in the church building without moving stuff from the Pavilion: in my experience, such a facility would enable us, for example, to offer a regular and welcome social time to the mid-week communicants, as well as enhancing hospitality on many other occasions. Our thanks go to Andrew Gore and the Fabric Committee for tackling all this, as well as those who have spent time on 'dreaming dreams' and suggesting de-cluttering. Thanks too, to the Friends, under Chris Morse's chairmanship, who are unfailingly generous and helpful, and work very hard for our building. Thank you, Chris, for getting our new stacking chairs organised – if not quite in time for Remembrance Day, certainly in time for Christmas!

Last year I began my report by mentioning so many things which go on in the background; I hope that all our very hard-working people have been thanked, one way or another during this meeting. But I specially want to Thank Sue Ellis and the Finance Committee (under Molly) who have steered us successfully into the parish Giving Scheme –and encourage as many of you as possible to transfer your gift aided donations into this scheme, which will

hugely help Sue and save her much valuable time. We must also thank Sue Mudge, who is an excellent PCC secretary, and of course Nanette, for her invaluable work as verger. Also, I must mention the two wonderful churchwardens, who work so hard, and upon whose wisdom and support I rely, as do we all. Thank you, David and Helene. And thanks, too, to Cathy Watts, who in the midst of all her other commitments, has agreed to be our Safeguarding Officer, upon Sue Filby's resignation (to whom, many thanks, too, for her excellent work over several years in this role and efficient handover.) But there are two other people whose contribution I specially want to highlight, because sadly, they are stepping down. I say 'sadly', but actually, when I mention Linda Read and her work in cleaning the church and running the rota, I must be honest, and say that I have told her firmly that she must not –as last year- valiantly say she will carry on until someone else can be found. That way she will never resign, which she ought to, for her own health. So – folks – it's now up to you to step up to the plate! Linda has been a hero. How is the church cleaning to be organised from now on?

The other person I should like to mention is our Administrator, Mel, who has recently given me two months' notice. Her younger daughter, Edie, is now in school, and understandably Mel wants to seek a job with more hours, although she wrote me a lovely resignation letter saying she had found the job as Administrator to be 'a gift from God' to her, in which she has enjoyed meeting so many lovely people. She has been a calm and reliable presence and has helped us transition to our new website which she manages efficiently, as with so many other aspects of our life. (Speaking of our website, I've forgotten till now to mention Rob Bricheno, who put in so much work on that, and John Thorne who had the vision for the change - it's all great! Thanks.) But returning to the administrator, I would end now by putting before everyone our need for a new one – preferably someone who will be part of the church, and have the skills and patience (not least with me) which Mel has shown over the last two years. Please start praying now, as we begin advertising the post this week.

There will be people I've missed out – please forgive me! But everyone here pulls their weight in so many different ways. May God bless us all in the coming year as we seek his kingdom together.