

Rector's Report, St Mary's, Linton, APCM 24th April 2016

To begin my report, I should like to thank everyone at St Mary's who has made me and the family so welcome. This has made for a very happy transition for us, and you really are a congregation with the gift of encouragement - among many other gifts! In particular, of course, my thanks go to the churchwardens, Molly and John, the Rector's Administrator, Sue Filby, and our verger, Nanette Blackmore, for the support, hard work, and supply of information without which I should have floundered. I am also extremely grateful to Lesley Gore for all she does, not just in Bartlow, but in Linton (where I have been shamelessly been asking more of her) and the retired clergy – the two Alans – who make it possible to go on offering a regular round of worship not just on Sundays, but also on weekdays, both here and in the other Team parishes. It's probably not practical for me to continue with a list of names for my thanks – the fear of missing someone out is one which haunts clergy on occasions such as these! – but you all know who you are, and how hard you work to glorify God in this place, and I would like to assure you that I am aware of all this, too, and very grateful. The annual report makes a very impressive read, and speaks of a church which is both a real community in itself, but also outward looking. I would like to say to you all a big thank you for voting at last Year's APCM to work towards overcoming the deficit in the parish's budget, and for the magnificent result you have achieved. It really would have been depressing to come into a parish where gloom and despondency about money meant that austerity measures were constraining the mission and worship of the church – so I really can't let this report go by without recording my thanks also specifically to Michael Younger as Stewardship Officer, and Sue Ellis, our Treasurer, for their part in this turnaround.

A couple of months ago I wrote a Rector's letter in which I detailed all the different post-holders whose leaving, during the time of my being here, have presented (and still are presenting) challenges. I want to assure you that I wrote this with no sense of resentment, nor with undue anxiety that the departures might have something to do with me personally! In a sense, listing these challenges was done almost as a comic exercise – 'Ah well, Here we go again!', when someone moves on...But this is not to say that I don't miss people who've felt it right to give up their ministry among us – and I certainly miss having a new House for Duty colleague whom I had hoped might be in post by now. There is so much I would like to plan for the Team as a Team – ways of working together a bit more, and standardising some of our policies and even our worship, which would make life easier – but I feel the need of someone to plan with, who could represent the smaller Team Parishes to me, and help them and us work through the implications of closer working together. Please continue to pray for the appointment of someone – the *right* someone – to fill this post.

On the subject of departures, this is the last Sunday, sadly, when Lucie and the rest of the Mordue family will be with us. They quite rightly feel that they should worship and work nearer to where they live – this is, after all, the Church of England way; we shall miss them, but thank them very much for all they have contributed, and wish them well. However, this does, for the time being, deal a blow to the Junior Church arrangements here in Linton which have limped-on during this year despite the appeals made last year and at other times for more leaders and helpers. So we are suspending Junior Church for the time being. I announce this with a heavy heart, because I notice that our attendance figures this year have already shown a drop in the attendance of children. Although a slight rise in adult attendance is much to be welcomed, we have to worry when the number of youngsters drops off – and not least when it's because we are providing less for them on some Sundays, because this may lead to their parents less inclined to attend on those Sundays, too. I am a great believer in what some may consider a rather old-fashioned idea – that Christians should do their level-best to worship with other Christians every week, and not just on a sporadic basis – and it troubles me when we have to do something that seems to make regular weekly worship less manageable for families. I think it reinforces the wrong message in a society where steady commitment is already a severely weakened concept.

Strictly speaking, it's not just the lack of teaching leaders which makes it impossible at the moment to offer Junior Church activities on the 1st, 4th and 5th Sundays; we have already for some time failed to fulfil our 'Safeguarding' obligations to have at least 3 known, trusted and checked adults in the Pavilion while children's work is being done there, which is a serious issue in itself.

I hope this moratorium on Junior Church will not have to last too long; maybe the shock of realising that it is happening will propel all of us into some creative thought about how to manage this side of our church's life better; maybe it will speak to some of our number and lead them to say, 'yes, this is work I really *ought* to get involved in'... It's easy to let appeals for help in groups which somehow manage to stagger on go unheeded; by saying 'It's got to stop, because we haven't enough help', we underline how urgent those appeals really were!

We suffer, of course, from a relatively small and undivided room in the Pavilion in which to offer both crèche facilities and teaching/worship space for older children. I would love to see 'Godly Play' story-telling on our agenda as a way of Christian development for those beyond crèche age – but this would need not only trained leaders, but also somewhere where a sense of calm and reflection could be engendered. I know that our curate, Nicola Bown, soon to be with us, would like to develop this aspect of teaching: how might we make that possible? It's a real question, but I believe that with the Lord there may be an

answer which we haven't quite seen yet. Please pray about this whole issue of children's activities (including, of course, going on praying for Messy Church and the All Age services.)

Meanwhile, we are indebted to Moire and Peter Jarritt who have taken on care of the Children's Corner, and are giving thought to resources for children to have and enjoy within services – perhaps resources which relate specifically to the themes the adults are reflecting on during the different seasons and Sundays of the year; so, if I have sounded very negative about what we have to offer children on Sundays which aren't All Age Eucharists, or Messy Church, I hope I haven't given the impression that there will be nothing for families at 10 am on the other weeks. If you have children in your care, please come and use what is on offer if you possibly can.

Mention of Nicola's arrival in July prompts cheerful mention of other ministry which the Lord is sending our way: almost at the same time as Duncan Keys sadly resigned, I heard that both Michael Wilcockson and Kate (or Cathy) Watts, who have homes in the village but work elsewhere, are Licensed Ministers (Readers) and would like to come onto our strength! Michael can only offer us occasional service for the next few years until he retires, so the diocese has simply applied for references as to his good-standing in the Diocese of Oxford so that he can take services 'as and when' as a locum. As things stand, this means he can be particularly helpful at the moment in some of the other Team Parishes, and he has already been very well received in a carol service at Shudy Camps, and Morning Prayer at Horseheath.

Kate/Cathy is in a position to offer her services as fully licensed here, and has been filling in the paperwork to make the transfer from St Albans Diocese. She has already been taking part fully in Messy Church, and has offered to help with Junior Church, if and when we have a viable team to run it again, so we are already enjoying her ministry. But I do need to ask PCC members to vote in favour of her being formally licensed to St Mary's, so that she can finish filling in the form! (I take this opportunity of asking for you to signify your delighted assent to that, so that we can find out how her ministry will develop among us, alongside that of Nicola Collard...) I should say, of course, that Licensed Lay Ministry is not all about preaching and leading services – all the very valuable work that Nicola does on our behalf with children and families and the schools, is an integral part of her calling as a Lay Minister or Reader, and benefits from her training. So, don't fret if you don't see that blue scarf up-front in church as often as you might have expected!

Looking to the future in a visionary way, I should like to encourage as many people as possible to take part in the meetings which David Parry-Smith and Molly Warrington are co-ordinating to think about how we might develop our mission in line with the Diocesan Strategy. We have taken the decision that the old Mission Action Plan has run its course, and many of its fruits (such as regular support for the Foodbank, to mention just one) are

embedded in the regular life of the church, which is as it should be. It's time to be looking towards a new Mission Action Plan, to inspire us for 2017 and beyond, and I am very keen that it should be one which grows out of the insight and prayer of the whole congregation, so that everyone can own it, and work to make it a reality. These groups that Molly and David are calling together are a step in that direction. Concrete ideas for the future which the groups come up with will be put to as many of you as possible for comment and refinement sometime in the autumn before the new PCC meets together to pull together a finished Mission Action Plan.

More immediately on the level of inspiration for the future, I would like us at St Mary's and in the whole Team to respond actively to an appeal by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to make the week before Pentecost this year one in which Christians and parishes all over the country engage in prayer for mission –and specifically, for the effective sharing of our faith. We all need to become more confident in doing this (and I speak for myself) and concerted prayer is a very good starting point. I shall write very soon a Rector's letter about how we can join in this great effort together. Meanwhile, you may like to look at a website which has been created to help with the prayer: it's called 'Thy Kingdom Come, which gives the clue that intentional use of the Lord's Prayer is going to be a central feature of the week. As the Archbishop of Canterbury observes in a video on the website, it's a prayer which is both comforting and dangerous – too dangerous, apparently for it to be broadcast in cinemas! (www.thykingdom.com). It is very likely that this prayer week before Pentecost may become a regular feature of the Church's calendar in England, so that in future years – with more notice – we may build and develop the way in which we take part as a Team.

Well, this has already turned out to be rather a long report, and I was once advised in a sermon class that if you don't know how to finish, then simply stop. So – I shall!