

## The Vicar's Annual Report 2017

2017 has been a year of continuity and change for St Mary's Theydon Bois and all the parishes of the newly formed United Benefice of "The Theydon Parishes" (which legally came into being in September 2017). At the beginning of 2017, the PCCs of the parishes which were to become the new Benefice (St Mary's Theydon Bois, All Saints Theydon Garnon and the Parish of Stapleford Tawney St Mary with St Michael's Theydon Mount) came together to agree our Benefice Vision, which is: **To be loving, caring and welcoming congregations who nurture each other to grow in faith together, through quality worship, Bible teaching and prayer, sharing the love of God in Christ with others by example and our activities in the community and wider world.**

Serving together, this vision is always going to be a work in progress, but there is much to be thankful to Christ for in our shared life. Particular thanks must go to our Churchwardens (Mary Gill and Michael Palmer) for all they have done often going well beyond the call of duty in the service of Christ and His Church. We are all very much in their debt. Every member ministry is essential for the local church to flourish, and whatever each of us does matters, so thank you, the churches would be diminished without the many acts of service done in the name of Jesus. As well as the "up front" roles there are many jobs behind the scenes which contribute to our worship services. Thank you to the sidespeople for the welcome they give week after week, and thanks to Liz Hannibal for her faithfulness in continuing to serve as Sacristan. Thank you to the ministry team, to Beryl Denney for her Reader ministry, to Tony Dawson for his ministry as our Authorised Local Preacher, to Liz Douglass and John and Rosalyn Philip for their sharing in leadership of All Age Worship and to Megan Broadley for all she does in the parish in her role as Youth Worker for the Mission and Ministry Unit (which comprises the churches of the Epping and Waltham Abbey teams and the Theydon Parishes). We have welcomed other clergy to officiate and I am grateful to Revds. Simon Elman, Hugh Taylor, Peter Smith, Joyce Smith and Barbara Read for their help.

During 2017, Sarah Bowen joined the Benefice as our Administrator. As the United Benefice is not a legal entity for employment purposes, Sarah is employed by the All Saints Theydon Garnon PCC on behalf of the whole Benefice, and the costs of her post are shared between all the churches. I am grateful to all the PCCs for making provision for financing the post, and to Sarah for all she has done in leading improving administration in the parish. 2017 also saw a new website created, funded through a grant from the Diocese of Chelmsford. Tim and Wendy Adams (who are members of All Saints Theydon Garnon) have created a contemporary website, which brings together the content from each church's previous web presence. Thank you too to Clare Drew who designed the new Benefice logo.

Thanks go to the Mission and Events Committees for all they do in drawing our community together and leading us in reaching out beyond the church walls into the wider community and beyond. It was their work that contributed to the continued successes of the Soup Lunches and our programme of social and fundraising events. We are blessed to be able to put on such a wide programme of events, and I am grateful to the army of people who do so many small things in order that these may go well. Thanks also to Joanna Miles-McKelvey and the team of flower arrangers for their arrangements throughout the year and especially for the superb decoration of the church for the Flower Festival, which was held in May.

Thank you for the generous financial support that many church members gave in 2017. The main funding stream for the church is what is given regularly through standing orders and the envelope scheme. Thank you to all who are part of the schemes and to all who give sacrificially in other ways. We were blessed to receive significant legacy donations in 2017, and it was an encouragement to know that people wished to continue to bless the work of St Mary's after their death. Legacy giving is a difficult topic, but please speak to either myself or a member of the finance team if you would like to find out more about leaving a gift to St Mary's in your will. Thank you to all those who serve on that finance team, to Andrew Tunks, (Treasurer), Sally Crone (Gift Aid officer) and to Carole Fenton who faithfully banks cash weekly. The Church Hall is a significant resource for the local community and source of regular income; we are indebted to the small team who manage the operation of the building.

Some highlights of the year included our worship at Easter, Harvest and Christmas and the All-Age Nativity service on the first Sunday of Advent. For our Christingle services, the church was full twice over, and I cannot thank enough those who came to make Christingles on December 23<sup>rd</sup>. 250 Christingles were made in an hour and a half! I would also like to record my thanks to Hugh Meteyard and all choir members and our organists who do so much to enhance our worship. Particularly, I would like to thank Hugh for the careful way the anthems are chosen each week, linking with the Bible readings for the day.

In the Diocese of Chelmsford, along with the whole Church of England, the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults is a key priority. Marion Smith has been working tirelessly as our Parish Safeguarding Representative, making sure that we are doing all we can to be safe and be seen to be safe. St. Mary's has been blessed with a significant number of children in our main Sunday services, and it is important that they are cared for well, and that those who lead the groups are trained, recruited and resourced following Diocesan policies.

Sadly, after many years of dedicated service, Fiona Bradley stepped down from the role of Junior Church coordinator, and subsequently decided to leave St Mary's altogether. This was difficult for all involved, and I would like to say how sorry I am that some members of St Mary's felt unable to continue worshipping here. For many years Fiona gave a significant amount of time to the role and went above and beyond what was asked of her. I would like to express my appreciation for all the good she did in St Mary's and recognize that publicly. I would also like to record my thanks to all those who have served as group leaders over the past year and express my regret that there was not time to thank publicly until now, those who have decided to step down from those roles. Towards the end of the year, with the support of the PCC, Luke and Sam Lowrie of the Red Balloon Family Foundation took on the role of co-ordinating our Sunday work with children and young people. They are both experienced youth workers and Luke has previously been youth worker at St Mary's Loughton and Deanery Youth Champion. They will be working with those who have decided to continue to serve as leaders for our children and young people's groups to develop this important aspect of Sunday worship in the year ahead.

The Good News Bible translation of Hebrews 10.25 is, "Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer". When there are challenges facing us in our community, what matters is that we continue coming together to worship, to pray and seek Jesus. In addition to our Sunday services, there are two housegroups, one monthly led by Lynne May and one weekly, led by Alan and Heather Higgins. Holy Communion is celebrated every Wednesday morning and Morning and/or Evening Prayer are said in the church most weekdays. In the year ahead, why not consider coming along to pray or study the Bible at one of these times, in order that we may continue to grow in faith together.