

# The Vicar's Annual Report 2020

At the beginning of 2020, churchwardens, leaders of sub-committees and ministry team members (defined as those who regularly lead or preach in our collective worship) gathered with leaders from other churches in the Benefice at the Diocesan Retreat House in Pleshey to review the shared life of the churches and begin to discern what may be next for us. Under Christ, we determined that our core values as a Benefice are **faith, love and community** and that we seek to live those out **by welcoming all, caring and teaching so that we may change lives through sharing the love of God in Christ.**

Community is at the heart of both the early church and the ongoing life of followers of Jesus. The disciples gathered around Jesus to learn from Him, and then as the number of followers grew, St. Luke writing in Acts records that “all who believed were together and had all things in common ... day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts. This is a vision of a group of people transformed and sharing what they had for the common good as well as for their shared life. Thanks to God, our parish finances are in relatively good health, and we have welcomed new members into our worshipping community but it is important never to let complacency get in the way of our common life. We are all called to give sacrificially of our time and talents and of our finances in order that the ministry of Christ may continue and grow in the parish.

I continue to be struck by and appreciative of the small army of people who give their skills and expertise. As ever, particular thanks must go to our Churchwardens (Charlie Chaplin and Hilary Mosley, ably assisted by Ann Clay and our Deputy Wardens) for all they have done going often well beyond the call of duty in the service of Christ and His Church. I am deeply grateful to Barry Burns for the quiet and disciplined way he continues to serve as our Treasurer, and also to Richard Clay for all he does to keep the building in good order. There are so many others who contribute in so many ways, thank you to you all for everything you do. St Mary's would not be the special place it is without your ministry.

Some highlights of the year included the annual Lambing Service and our traditional candle-lit Nine Lessons and Carols service. It was a real team effort to prepare the church for Christmas and Advent, and it would be wrong not to note my appreciation to all those who on numerous occasions during the year gave their time to decorated the church so beautifully. I would also like to record my thanks to Tim Adams for his leading our All Age Services, Alison Mortimer for leading our Children's Church and all choir members and our organists who do so much to enhance our worship. Sadly in 2019, we mourned with members of the congregation and the wider community. Although those are difficult days, as followers of Jesus it is possible to meet those times with the hope which comes from the words of Jesus.

The Safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults is a key priority. John Chaplin has continued to be our Parish Safeguarding Representative, making sure that we are doing all we can to be Good News as well as talk about it through looking after the vulnerable. Heather Lawrence continues to exercise great care for elderly members of All Saints and I am grateful for the time she gives to be present with those who are in need of a friendly face at difficult times. We have continued to benefit from Sarah Bowen's work as our part-time paid Benefice Administrator, and she does a great deal behind the scenes alongside Ann Clay to ensure that the Occasional Offices take place so smoothly.

At the recent Deanery Congress, Bishop Peter began the presentation with words from Isaiah 43:18-19; “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing” – and I believe as we look forward together this an important principle to keep in mind. There are challengers, both financial and in terms of the need for volunteers to support the many rotas and ministries, but there are also opportunities as we look forward. All Saints has been a symbol of the presence of Christ in this part of the world for nearly 750 years, and I am confident that the God who was and is and is to come still has good things in store for the Christian community here.

Since my writing the annual report, much is different both in the church, nation and wider world. At the annual meeting in 2021, there will be opportunity to reflect more fully on the ways in which the world has changed and the impact it has had on each of the Theydon Parishes. But for now, I would like to add my particular thanks and appreciation to everyone who has served in new ways to enable our worshipping life to continue during the period when our building was closed as we have begun to re-inhabit the sacred spaces of the Benefice. In particular Tim Adams transformed into a video producer working with Carol and I to put together our recorded services from late March to July. Thank you to the small army of people behind the scenes who among other things, looked out for their neighbours, and shopped for them.

The challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic are not over, and there are still many challenges to face. Please pray for all in leadership in the Benefice, as we adjust to services with physical distancing and begin to plan for the season of remembrance in November and a Christmas which will more than likely be very different, pray for those who lost a loved one and who were not able to have the funeral they had wished for, pray for those who have postponed weddings and hope to marry in 2021, and above all, please continue to pray for the mission and ministry of All Saints Theydon Garnon and all the parishes that we may be witnesses to the unchanging hope for tomorrow found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.