

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 worship has continued and the churches continue to be open as places of encounter with God. As followers of Jesus, 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 (Margaret Dennis and Jo Shephard) 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 Cindy Pridmore for all she does as our Treasurer, there are be financial challenges facing us and we are blessed to have her oversight at this time. There are so many others who contribute in so many ways, thank you to you all for everything you do.

Some highlights of the year included the regular parish lunches, which are a powerful symbol of the sense of community there is in the parishes. Thank you to Maggie and Gill, Ann and everyone who makes them such a success. Other events included Easter, Christmas and who can forget the Pet Service we held in July, I have never blessed a horse before! It would be wrong not to note my appreciation to all those who on numerous occasions during the year gave their time to decorate the church so beautifully, and the Events committee who do much to generate funds for the church. I would also like to record my thanks Colin and Edna Flint for all they do resourcing our sung worship; to our choir and organists and to Martyn Lockwood for his leading our worship so regularly, and for his conducting funerals on occasion.

The Safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults is a key priority. Martyn Lockwood 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. 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 to ensure that Benefice business is conducted 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 in early March, much has changed. 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 us. 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 buildings were closed. 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. The challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic are not over, and there are still many challenges to face. Please pray for the Churchwardens, as they work to keep the buildings open safely and accessibly for the community, pray for all those involved in leading worship as we adjust to services with physical distancing and 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 witness to Jesus in all of the Theydon Parishes that we may be witnesses to the unchanging hope for tomorrow found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.