

The Vicar's Annual Report 2022

Each year in the pattern of readings that we follow Sunday by Sunday, we encounter extracts from John's Gospel. In this more thematic rather than chronological account of Jesus' life, the reader is taken on a journey beginning with the famous prologue ("In the beginning was the Word..." - which is read at every First Communion of Christmas in the Benefice Christmas) and concluding with the resurrection accounts. At the end of Chapter 20, there is a recognition that there is not enough space for John to include all that Jesus did, but those things which are written are chosen so that the reader may "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through faith you may have life in his name" In the last twelve months, as our pattern of services and other activities have resumed in full and without restrictions, life has become more visible once again. There is much to be thankful for; highlights in the Benefice have included seeing all our church buildings filling up to celebrate Christmas in a variety of services; welcoming children back into St Mary's Theydon Bois to launch the Arts Society Church Trails (a project since expanded to include the other churches of the Benefice); hosting a Deanery Confirmation service, and seeing familiar faces from the farming community at our Harvest service and Pet service at St Mary's, Stapleford Tawney.

Every year, I write of my thankfulness to the team of people who do so much to resource our worship, and the organizational tasks that take place behind the scenes. The church is described as the body of Christ and as I see all that takes place, I am amazed by the wisdom, skill, time and talents contributed by so many. My sincere thanks to you all. Our team of Churchwardens carry a particular set of responsibilities and the team made up of Mary Gill, Margaret Dennis, Jo Shephard, John Chaplin, Liz Hannibal and Hilary Mosely, has continued to exercise its leadership in a wise and Godly way. It is fair to say, it would have been a far harder task to minister without their counsel and friendship. Liz Hannibal has decided that for the second time, it is the right moment to pass the baton onto someone else. Liz volunteered to return as Warden two years ago, and I am grateful to her for her willingness to use her time in this way. Rev. Carol Newnham has continued to serve alongside me, and it has been good to serve alongside and pray with her this year. Sarah Bowen continues as our Benefice Administrator to keep us in good order, and in particular she has been a welcoming first point of contact for those seeking ministry from the parishes in times of joy and sorrow. The Benefice continues to commit to doing all we can to be a safe space for all, and with the work of Andrea Crombie and John Chaplin as Parish Safeguarding Officers, we have continued to follow the House of Bishops' guidance on Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable adults, including following safer recruitment practices. All members of the parochial church councils who wished to continue serving beyond their current term of office have been asked to complete basic and foundation Safeguarding training (online or in person) and complete a Domestic Violence Awareness training module. We continue to see a significant section of the Sunday congregation being made up of children and young people at St Mary's Theydon Bois and All Saints Theydon Garnon where Sarah Twitchett (our allocated worker from Red Balloon Foundation has been leading the work) and Alison Mortimer continue respectively to lead the work. Thanks are also due to the team of volunteers who have been recruited following Safer Recruitment processes and also to Hugh and Diana Meteyard who give of their time to resource the Junior section of the choir in St Mary's TB.

When we reflect on the year that is past, it is easy to miss the signs of the Kingdom among us. Recently in our Sunday worship in the pattern of readings, we encountered the story of Nicodemus, who was a religious teacher who sought out Jesus at night time. He took a chance, leaving behind the safety of the world he knew to seek an encounter with Jesus. Being vulnerable and at risk did not prevent him receiving a message which has echoed down the years that life in all its fullness – eternal life which is the life of the Kingdom of God - is found through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who gave his life for the sake of the world and rose again to a new quality of life in which He invites the world to join him. This message has been passed down to us through generations of followers before us, some of whom were far more at risk than the Christian community of the Theydon Parishes is. They had no place to worship or call their own, and risked their very lives in dedication to the faith, as do many living in other nations in the contemporary world. This doesn't mean that we should not recognize the challenges we face in the Theydon Parishes including, but not limited to, the need for a new roof at All Saints Theydon Garnon, and there being fewer people joining in Sunday worship (although the midweek services have seen some growth). Rather, having seen them, approach them being thankful for all that has been in Jesus Christ, and say yes to facing with Jesus that which is to be in order that the Christian faith may continue to be lived and proclaimed in these places.