

Christ Church West Wimbledon Vicar's Report to the APCM 2006



As is traditional, I'd like to begin my report this morning by expressing my gratitude to our church wardens. Sue and Chris are as dedicated, supportive, and hard working a pair of wardens a vicar could ever wish for and we are all very fortunate to have them. I am especially grateful that Sue Rocksborough Smith is willing to serve for one more year beyond the five she thought she was signing up to in 2001. This is not a complete disaster and Sue has not had to be dragged screaming and kicking into a sixth year (to be honest I wouldn't fancy trying to drag Sue kicking and screaming anywhere!). but let's not beat about the bush, Sue is rescuing us from a difficulty that a church like ours with something like 120 people worshipping on a Sunday and with an electoral roll of 240+ should not be in. There is no doubt that being a church warden is a significant commitment of time and energy and is a senior position of leadership in our church's life. However, it reflects badly on us all that once a vacancy was announced, not one person came even to talk to me about the possibility of taking it on. This has led to Sue offering to carry on for one more year. We all need to do better next year or we really will be in trouble.

Thanks also to Bob Baker stepping down from the PCC this year and to John Davey who for EIGHTEEN years has navigated us through the financial waters of the Church of England as PCC treasurer. Being treasurer at all would be cause for grateful thanks but to have filled the office for so long and in so distinguished a fashion, juggling often precarious sets of figures with such good grace, common sense and skill is worthy of our warmest appreciation in token of which I'd like to ask John to accept this symbolic token of our gratitude for his many years of service.

It is with great sadness that we have also to express our posthumous gratitude to Margaret Thomas who after a two year struggle with cancer, died in hospital last week. Not only as a member of the PCC this time round but as a servant of Christ Church and the wider church for many years, Margaret has been a major contributor to church life. We will miss her insightful intelligence, ready wit and faithful commitment to Christian action as well as faithful belief. In addition to Margaret, we have commended into God's loving hands; Veronica Roberts, Joan Devis, Alma Nye, Susan Houghton, Ken Aylwin and Joyce Ridding from our electoral roll. We will miss them all but are grateful for what they have given in word, deed and prayer.

Elsewhere, this has been a year of consolidation after two previous years of change and new initiatives. That said we have not been standing still. It is marvellous to see that our electoral roll has leapt up to 243. In April 2003 the number was 167. We are a growing church. One significant cause of this has been our Life Lines service. Although numbers at our 11.30am service remain small Sunday by Sunday, it caters for a constituency many of whom, for a whole range of practical and sociological reasons, are able to come to church regularly but not weekly. We welcome and celebrate this new 'wing' to our house and look to strengthen and develop it in the years ahead. We have also welcomed new members of our congregation at 10.00am. We have had lots of baptisms in the last year and a significant proportion of those families have stuck with us after the big day. It is a joy to see new faces and I acknowledge the skill which our established community shows in making new people feel welcome. Again and again people tell me they have felt welcomed and that Christ Church is a warm and friendly community. Well done! Long may it continue.

Beyond Sunday mornings the year has been as action packed as ever. The collection of reports from the various groups and committees at Christ Church are available for you to peruse. Some of the highlights for me in no particular order were our Parish Open Day in September where we invited the local community to come and see us and reminded ourselves of the greater whole in which we play our individual part, the choir singing Faure's 'Requiem' on Palm Sunday, the Patronal Festival when, praise God, the programme ran smoothly and one part of the day

eased gently into the next unhurriedly and on time!, our shared service of confirmation with Kings College School and important institution in our parish and one which has been semi-detached from the church for a while. It was good to bind the school's religious life more closely into the day to day life of the parish church.

In the Parish Office Sara Taylor Coolahan took up her expanded role in September. Having someone able to staff the office for four mornings a week has transformed my administrative life and I am very grateful for Sara's common sense, initiative, organisation and skill in running what is an unwieldy beast at the best of times. That's the office you understand not me..... Sara works in close collaboration with Paul Brazier in producing our weekly news sheet, orders of service and publicity material for parish events and we are grateful as ever to Paul for his creativity and dedication.

In January of this year our annual review of stewardship emphasised, after last years highly successful financial review, the ways in which we are called to serve God with our time and talents. it was very good to be able to add new names to rotas, involve more people in many different church activities and see already committed people take on new or different jobs. At it's recent away day the PCC looked at itself and the way it organises and runs meetings and also looked to see whether there were any major areas of work that needed to be undertaken. One of the striking features of the day was that although there were a number of suggestions for areas of work, there was no blindingly obvious area of church life that needs immediate attention. However, a common thread through the day and at a subsequent meeting was the need for us to make sure that a growing congregation feels that everyone is included, everyone is wanted, needed even when it comes to the many and varied tasks and roles in church life. There are no 'no go' areas at Christ Church. No job or task or area of service is confined to those who have qualified by the length of time they've been here. We need to make sure that everyone knows that this is a place where they can use the gifts that God has blessed them with.

I have spoken this morning about the value of the Emmaus Road story for us in Easter. In January we began the long road to June with an Emmaus Road experience of our own. In three five week blocks we are offering the possibility of exploring of our faith for those who are new to church and also as a source of refreshment to those who have been around a little longer. A small group of nine went through the first block and the second has just started. Offering the

possibility to deepen our faith in this way is I believe an essential part of our mission to be educators as well as prayers and I'm sure that this is something we will continue with in years to come.

I'd like to conclude with a bit of news...no I've not (yet) been asked to be the next Bishop of Oxford!! I have been asked by the bishop to attend a conference in October on 'The Spirit of Risk and Enterprise in the Church' at St Georges House Windsor. I have to confess that I'd not heard of these courses before but it turns out it's a bit of a feather in one's cap if one gets asked to go so there, a feather. But it does mean that I will be away from the parish for two weeks (one Sunday) in October. This will be an opportunity for you to get used to me not being around for a time as in January 2007, I have been offered and have accepted a three month sabbatical which will run from January 15th- April 15th. This means some extra work for Sara in the office, the wardens and the PCC in those months but I will make sure that everything that needs clerical cover will get it before I embark on this time of rest, study, prayer and reflection. As I formulate with the Bishop and Jane Steen the Canon Theologian, the details of my area of examination, I will keep you informed but for now I wanted you to know that this was coming up.

Finally, as we look back on a good year and look ahead to the exciting and challenging times which face us here and more widely the national and international Anglican Church, we ask God's blessing upon us as we seek to serve in God's name and be the face of Christ to the people of this parish.



REVD RICHARD LANE,
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