

## Vicar's Report to APCM 2009

This is the point in the year when I always feel like one of Victoria Wood's characters who says during one monologue... 'I'm a very grateful person... in fact my motto is 'longitude or latitude my attitude is gratitude' Well that's me at the APCM. Very, very grateful. We have two very hard working Church Wardens. Mark has managed to balance an extremely time consuming year of training to be a teacher with his role as warden as well as the rest of his life. I know that at times this has been very hard work and yet he never seems to flag in his commitment, creativity and energetic service to Christ Church. We are lucky to have him. Chris, tonight, completes his five year stint as warden. Generous, kind and considerate, Chris has been a truly dedicated church warden. His warm greeting of worshippers on Sunday mornings has contributed tremendously to that pervasive sense of openness and welcome that so many people refer to when they speak of Christ Church. We would like him to accept this small token of our affection and gratitude for all of his hard work over the last five years.

Tonight, as well, our treasurer, David Essex, comes to the end of his three year period of service on the PCC and therefore relinquishes the financial reins of the parish. We are enormously privileged to have had David with us on the PCC where he has brought his forensic skills of analysis, clear thinking and erudition to bear upon our sometimes uncertain handling of financial matters. David has been in the van of a determined effort by the PCC to make sure that money does not float off into some separate hinterland of church affairs. He has rightly identified that what we do with our money, and other resources, speaks volumes about every other aspect of our church life. Stewardship and mission go hand in hand. We are not nor ought to be embarrassed to talk about our income, expenditure or fiscal priorities. David has helped us to clear thinking. I personally and I know many others are extremely appreciative of his contribution over the last three years. So David, here too is a little something for you with our thanks and best wishes.

As ever I would also like to thank the other members of the 'staff' team. Our evergreen organist continues in good heart (*surely he's nearly 70 these days isn't he?*), grace is as dedicated and efficient as ever and I really, really don't know what we'd do without Sara in the office. There are loads of others doing fantastic stuff to keep the show on the road of course but this year I'd like at this very difficult time, like to pay tribute to Brenda Thurgood. We all know Brenda is a little dynamo. I'm sure Brenda and solving the energy crisis must be able to go together somehow. She is wholly reliable, cheerful, funny, caring and fun. She is our rota angel as well as so much more in the parish. We all, I'm sure send her and Richard our love and prayers tonight.

More thanks now to Sharon Mawhinney who has just been acclaimed as our new church warden. I am really looking forward to working with Mark and Sharon as we begin to look ahead at what and who Christ Church will be in the future. It's a brave thing to give into the vicars badgering about being church warden. I know that Sharon will be able to rely on all of you to encourage and support her in her new ministry. Thanks too to Rachel Harrison who has agreed to juggle two daughters with the church finances as she consents to being elected PCC treasurer. It's good to hear that Dee Babar is willing to serve on the PCC for three more years and we welcome Mike Hammond onto the PCC for the first time.

At this point, I'd like to pause for a moment to remember two long standing members of our congregation who have died since we last met for our annual meeting. Peggy Lancet and Joan Nagele

were both fantastic servants of God and the church in this parish and we commend them both into his loving hands.

Onto our sesquicentennial! Much of the past year has been taken up with planning and then, since February, implementing our year of celebrations to mark 150 years of worship and service. I don't want to spend all night going into too much detail about every part of the year but I would like to say how gratified and impressed I am that having got up in church and said that we can't have a party year without lots of people joining in and doing their bit, that is just what has happened. So many people have been or are beavering away planning, organising, sorting, buying printing cooking, phoning emailing and on and on. It's tiring but it's great. We had a really enjoyable Patronal Festival with the Bishop of Kingston; the children's party was one of the highlights of my 5½ years at Christ Church and the rest of the year is going to be just as good. I'm particularly looking forward to squeezing in all the former clergy readers, organists and other old friends that we are expecting for our centre-piece celebration on July 5<sup>th</sup>.

Another note-worthy development this year has been the return of the parish magazine. Thanks to David Essex, Naomi Lowe and everyone David has press-ganged into contributing, we have, once more, a magazine to be proud of. Beautifully designed with informative, entertaining content our magazine is a real contribution to our continuing efforts to communicate who we are and what we are about not only to each other but also to anyone else we can get a copy before.

In the rest of the year I have to say that I thought that Christmas and Easter mornings this year were particularly special occasions. All Souls was well attended and much appreciated by those we invited. Church Teas on the last Thursday of the month have been really good this year - thanks to the pastoral team for them. We began a theology discussion group at the start of this year and it has really taken off. We haven't had a meeting with less than 14 members present and we have gone up to twenty. All are welcome and in May we have Michael Meacher with us to discuss Christianity and Science. I have been completing my new members programme for the Iona Community and in July will be hallowed as a full member. The community has given me a real lease of life in the church and I am grateful to my brothers and sisters in the community and to you for being so accommodating of me on my jaunts up to the island and to Glasgow.

For the rest, some of those areas of concern I wrote about last year remain. Numbers at activities outside Sunday morning are often low. Many fewer than I expected wanted to come on the parish pilgrimage, only four signed up to come on the parish quiet day, very few come to lent or advent prayer and discussion groups, only two or three come to children's church on Tuesday afternoons. It is my sense that the nature of involvement in church is changing rapidly. We are about the same numbers on a Sunday morning as when I arrived at Christ Church and yet a number of regular worshippers have died or moved away. I think that we are a bigger community but one where we are all gathered together much less frequently. Life Lines now has a congregation of around 30 but they are never all there together. There are many more young children at Christ Church but they are never all present at the same time. We have something like 17 in the youth group but rarely see more than 8 in one go.

On May 30<sup>th</sup> the Archdeacon will lead the first of two PCC away days that together will help us to reflect upon these changes and begin to formulate a response to them. We celebrate, this year, a milestone on our journey of faith. We stop and look around, celebrating where we've come from and giving thanks for who we are now where we've arrived at and what it is that has brought us here. Now we will look ahead to what is asked of us next. In our liturgy, our structures, our buildings, our

music, our worship, our communications, we will need to see where we need to be refreshed in order to effectively serve the people of this parish in the future. We can't stand still and do what we have been doing all over again. 2009 and the celebration of our sesquicentennial closes one chapter in the story of our church and opens the first pages of a new one. It'll be exciting! It might be scary; it'll probably be hard work. But if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, we will recognize God with us every step of the way. Assured, confident steps as well as trips and stumbles. Safe in that knowledge, on we go.