

Vicar's Report to APCM 2010

Let me begin by once again thanking our hard working church wardens for another year's service at Christ Church. I am happy to report that they are both in rude health and living testimony to the fact that though a significant commitment in terms of time and energy, being church warden won't suck the life blood out of you, isn't a job only for the saints and angels, won't mean that you have to live in the church (on the whole) and will leave you time variously to feed or educate the children in your life.

Thanks also to members of the PCC who have worked especially hard this year. Some of them even attended TWO Away Days! Dedication indeed. This meeting sees the stepping down of Celia Berwick who has recently contributed so wonderfully to our eating and drinking at church. As heaven is going to be the best party you can possibly imagine, we owe a debt of gratitude to Celia for the little slices of paradise she has served to us in her years on the PCC. I am delighted to be able to tell you that she intends to continue helping with the work of the social committee.

Earlier this year I accepted the resignation of Heather Field from the PCC. Heather moved away from the area some time ago and increasingly finds it hard to serve on committees when Amy, Sam, Charlie and I expect Nigel too make so many calls on her time. Heather remains a committed member of our worshipping community and we thank her for her time on the PCC too. Brenda Clark has also now served a period of three years on the PCC but has been persuaded that her role of PCC secretary combined with enormous levels of love and popularity mean that she really has no choice but to kindly offer herself for a second three year term. I am very pleased to welcome Ron Barnett to the PCC. We look forward to the contribution he has to make. There remains one vacancy on the PCC which can be filled as soon as I become aware of anyone interested in filling the position.

After Christmas we celebrated Ron Cayless's seven years with us as Director of Music. I would like to record again my deep appreciation and gratitude for all that Ron has given to us in our musical life. In addition to his seven years service, Ron has been kind and gracious enough to continue, with Cynthia in support the playing of the organ at services and the maintenance of our choir during our musical interregnum. It gives me great pleasure this evening to welcome Irene Clugston as our new Director of Music. Irene takes up her duties this Sunday and we very much look forward to having her with us. Finally in the thankyous, I'd like to pay tribute to Sara in the parish office and Grace our verger for all the hard work they do at church. I couldn't manage without either of them and I'm very grateful for their ministry at Christ Church.

This year we have seen quite a few new faces at church. Some have come for a wedding or a baptism and have stayed, some have moved into the area, some have joined us from other church communities, as we are fond of singing at Christ Church 'All are welcome'. Sadly we have also had to say farewell to some long standing members of our community. Since our last APCM, Max Brown, Lily Fawcett, Hazel Jones and Lily George have 'gone to glory' and heaven is a better place for having them there while we mourn not having them here.

If it's a party up there, then it's been pretty heavenly down here since we last gathered in this way. Parties are probably not quite the hard work to organise that they are down here but that's no excuse not to have them. And party we have! Since last years APCM we really celebrated our 150th anniversary with style. Parish Pilgrimage, Trip to Chichester, Summer Ball, Celebration service with bishops, vicars and curates all over the place, a bucks fizz tea party, the most wonderful open weekend, a come and sing Messiah and to round it all off a fantastic, brass knobbed carol service. Well done to everyone who made it a fabulous year. I think we really did ourselves proud and also managed to think about others at the same time as we raised £7000 for our 'Hand Up' appeal divided between South Thames Crossroads and the Diocese of Matabeleland. On top of which, we still have the excitement of the new high altar kneeler to come! At this point of looking back, I think that it's

worth paying special tribute at this meeting to our social committee who always work creatively and really hard on our behalf but this year ladies and gentlemen you truly excelled yourselves. Many thanks from all of us.

For the rest, this has not been a year of new initiatives, new directions or particular change. We purposefully took a year to celebrate our 150th and while I think we did the usual things pretty well, we didn't seek out new developments or radical changes. We did however remember that in 2008, we said that we would keep our life under review and to that end, the PCC met twice last year, once with the Archdeacon and once under my direction to begin to formulate a vision for Christ Church in the coming years. This has begun and there will be more on this later in the meeting. At this point though I wanted to say something about my role in all of this. Vicars are funny things; we arrive into historic communities chosen by a small number of people who hope that they have detected an appropriateness about a particular individual. We come with a vision for a place, a vision predicated upon what and who that community already is. The vicar needs to be informed by the community as she or he seeks the ways in which God is calling that community forward. A wise vicar seeks to ensure that vision is shared and not imposed. That said, no one man or woman can of course be in step with every single individual in a community of 200 people. As we seek our way ahead together, it is my fervent hope that we will continue to walk together. I believe that there are exciting times ahead for Christ Church. Exciting times for some are of course scary times for others, irritating times for others still and sometimes, after reflection and careful thought, a community decides that it does not share the vision with its vicar and that they will take different paths. We are in a time of discernment. We are at a point of discussion and conversation about the best way ahead. We can't stand still, we never have. I hope that in all that is to come we will all be able to engage with the process prayerfully and with a readiness to listen to and be open with others with whom perhaps we disagree. I pray this most of all for myself.

In the end though, I trust this community. I know that we do not run away from a challenge, that we are not afraid of change that we are keen to serve the community to the best of our abilities and that we are ready to listen to God as he calls forward.