

Vicar's Report to 2012 APCM

As ever, I'm very grateful to be able to use the opportunity of my report to the annual parish meeting to express my thanks to a number of people. I'm not going to try to name you all as there are so many at Christ Church who contribute to who we are and what we do.

I have to begin of course by thanking our church wardens. Sharon and Mark are fantastic church wardens and go about their duties unfussily and with complete dedication. They are a blessing to us all. Extraordinarily this morning is the point at which Mark comes to the end of his five year period of service and so he is due our particular appreciation and thanks. He was a young man when he started...just look at him now! Joking aside, this has been a pretty extraordinary five years in Mark's life and we have been privileged not only to have had him as warden but to have been able to hang onto him through some pretty eventful phases of his life. Apart from anything else he deserves a round of applause at this very moment for being willing to continue as warden even when he moved house to Sydenham!

Overcoming the distance, Mark's service has been distinguished by his good grace, his sense of humour, his creativity and his unwavering commitment to the life of this church. Exciting new things start from today but we will miss him as warden. We'll give him a couple of weeks to catch his breath but then I've got all sorts of other things I'd like him to be involved with!

This morning we also express our gratitude to Dee Babar after two three year periods of service on the PCC. Dee is the only elected member to step down this year. In addition, Mike Hammond comes to the end of his first three year term but has kindly agreed to serve for three more.

Last May, the PCC co-opted Lynda Coleman to serve on the PCC as Hall Committee liaison and now after many years service, Lynda is stepping down from the Hall Committee and so from the PCC. Lynda has, one way or another been on the PCC ever since I came to Christ Church and we will sorely miss her wisdom, insight, carefully analytical eye and capacity to have the PCC giggling like infants. She most certainly deserves a rest from Hall and PCC but we really will miss her. Ever since I came to Christ Church, Lynda has brilliantly managed to help me understand things. She is generous in her thanks and praise when things go well, and perhaps even more valuably, gets it exactly right when needing to express concern, the need for change or simply pointing out when things aren't right. To bring this sort of thing to the fragile ego of the vicar without leaving him feeling bruised and got at when she's done, is a gift indeed. I very much hope that she won't be giving up offering the vicar wise council. He needs it!

(Although it is probably worth remembering that he almost certainly doesn't need it ten minutes before the service is about to begin).

This morning we welcome David Essex as our new Church Warden. David is already known to many members of the congregation and I am very much looking to working with him. He brings a wealth of experience of church and the world to the office, he brings intelligence, lots of good ideas and a rigour and clarity of thought that I know I will benefit from. Also, for those who don't know him well, he brings depths of generosity, kindness and thoughtfulness that we all look forward to benefitting from.

We also welcome Ian Christie and Mary Ann Bown back to the PCC. We are a gifted congregation and it's great to have some of those gifts brought to the deliberations and work of the PCC.

This year the Bruno Bear club has undergone a change of management. Last year we thanked Heather for heroically carrying on despite her move out to the wilds of Epsom. Sensibly, management has now devolved (been foisted upon?) Emma Golder and Jennifer Nelson. We are really grateful to both of them.

In October our Director of Music resigned and after an initially encouraging process of advertising, drawing up of a short list and establishment of interview dates, the whole thing descended into near chaos as candidates dropped out, dropped back in again and then dropped out for good. We were rescued by Tom Theakston who wandered in one Sunday in the middle of the tumult and asked if he could come and practice on the organ letting me know, casually, that he was thinking of moving on from his position as parish organist some miles away because of the distance. Restraining myself from taking hold of him with both hands, I invited him to read the job description and apply for the vacancy here. The rest is history. Not even the sainted Ron used to get routine rounds of applause on Sunday mornings. I think we all appreciate Tom's

musicality, his liveliness and his skill. I certainly appreciate his demeanour, share his attitude to church music and value his willingness to experiment, 'have a go' and expectation that music will be fun.

Last April, we noted that our Life Lines service would need review. We have undertaken that review and come to our current pattern of 11.30am services on 2nd and 3rd Sundays.

I probably need to say something about Baptisms at this point. We are, I'm delighted to say, awash with baptisms at the moment. Our policy of offering up to three baptisms once a month at each of the 10.00am and 11.30am services continues. When we moved to having a monthly 11.30am service in September last year, we quickly realised that such was the demand that every 11.30 was becoming a baptism service. Therefore, a further tweak was added so that now there is an 11.30am service on 2nd Sundays at which Baptisms take place and 11.30 services on 3rd Sundays when they do not. With me? No, neither are a lot of the families who come for baptism. Never mind, we'll get the hang of it eventually. The important thing is that when families come here they encounter a warm welcome and a sense of a living church community which mixes up all ages, genders, all colours and any sexuality. We are, I think, a properly inclusive, Anglican church that fully represents the community in which we serve and not just a bit of it. I celebrate that fact and I think that the numbers of families coming to us for baptism is as a result of who we are and the gospel we preach.

Recently, evening prayer was reformed and we are currently engaged in a six month experiment where BCP evensong is offered on first fourth and fifth Sundays of the month, a contemporary service of evening prayer on the second and a celtic communion on the third. We will review this new pattern in October.

As you will all have noticed, our new lighting scheme was completed this year. There remain one or two minor wrinkles to be ironed out but we will be ready to welcome Chris Skilton our Archdeacon when he comes on May 27th at the 10.00am service to dedicate our new lights. I think they're fantastic, I hope you do too and I'd like to thank all of you who gave to the Lighting appeal and also those who remembered Christ Church in their will. Without those bequests, our fundraising would still have a very long way to go.

Finally, a word about the proposed building project. That word is very short as this year until last Monday at least; there has been absolutely no progress with this proposal at all. We have seriously lost momentum. The reason for this is that at this point last year the Steering Group managing this process for the PCC had been offered two sets of drawings for the proposed development. The group expressed its preferences. It seems that at this point diocesan officers decided that the architect who had drawn up the proposals we liked was not one they felt they could work with and our scheme rolled into the long grass. The most unacceptable aspect of this was the silence with which our inquiries, requests for information and eventually protests were received. In the end, a complaint to the Archdeacon got the ball rolling again and I'm pleased to say that at our meeting on Monday, new architects offered revised plans which the steering group will consider tomorrow. We are back on track and the process will now continue with the Steering Group coming into regular conversation with the architects and the Diocesan Surveyor to draw up a finalised scheme. This will then come to the PCC for discussion and approval. At that point the consultation for planning process begins and every member of the congregation will be able to see what is proposed and be able to comment and question and contribute. I hope very much that by this time next year we will have reached that point.

I'd like to end this year by saying that for the next five years you have to be really nice to me....REALLY nice. Last week the bishop asked me if I'd be willing to serve as Area Dean and God help me...I said I would. This hasn't been announced yet so keep it to yourselves will you? Thanks. It's not promotion, it's not preferment, there's no extra money, kudos, status or benefit. It's a dog's job really but someone's got to do it. It means I'll have to go to Deanery Synod now! It's the sort of thing that in Merton Deanery needs to be done by someone who has at least a chance of holding together some pretty diverse ways of being Anglican. I suppose I appreciate that the bishop at least thinks that I'm the sort of person who might be able to prevent evangelicals and liberals biting chunks out of each other. I think I'm about to discover in microcosm what it was like being Rowan for the last decade! Prayers please...I really will need them.

But then I and you and everyone need them any way. I think I can do it because actually, I do feel prayed for and supported here. If life and ministry here was a daily struggle then I really wouldn't feel I could have said yes. In the end, the bishop and I have you to thank for being able to say yes.