

Christ Church West Wimbledon APCM 2015 – Vicar's Report

As ever, I'd like to begin my report by expressing my appreciation and gratitude to our church wardens Sal Edmunds and Julie Grainger. They are both excellent wardens and we are very fortunate to be served by their commitment, energy and skill. In addition to serving as wardens in terms of 'ordinary' parish life, both Julie and Sal are members of the Building Development Committee and as such take on considerably more work than might be expected if we were not in the process of improving our buildings so extensively.

Thanks also to Mike Hammond who is stepping down from PCC membership this morning having given two three year periods of service. We are very grateful for all he has contributed to the PCC. I'm very happy to say that Mike has agreed to continue as our electoral roll officer and as a member of the Social Committee so he won't be fading away into the back ground! Ian Christie and Mary Ann Bown have agreed to serve for a second three year block and we welcome this morning, Vivian Harris and Naomi Lowe to PCC membership. Vivian has already earned many weeks off purgatory by being regular hall bookings secretary and Naomi is our resident design consultant and so both are very warmly welcomed to the PCC.

This year we really got going on the implementation of our Mission Action Plan. Starting at the top, we have completed the initial stages of setting up our small group network at Christ Church. The eighty or so members of our congregation who have expressed an interest in being part of a small group are being contacted almost as we speak and invited to their first meetings. Groups will mostly meet monthly and over time, will establish for themselves the exact nature, tone, emphasis and 'style' of their group. A list of the groups will appear on the notice board and any member of the congregation, new or well established, who has not yet expressed a desire to join a group, will now be very welcome to join in.

The second action on our plan was to introduce the 'Pilgrim' discipleship material at Christ Church and to invite the congregation to participate in the discussions. We decided to conflate action 1 and 2 and so our small groups are the place where 'Pilgrim' is to be found at Christ Church. Even greater motivation, should greater motivation be needed, to become part of a group!

Third on our list was to establish a new email list and to communicate more effectively with the congregation with it. The list is as complete as it can be at the moment (although email slips remain at the back of church and we're always happy to have your email address if we don't already have it). In the next couple of weeks we will begin to send out weekly news messages so that as many of us as possible can be kept up to date with what's going on.

Next we said that we wanted a series of eye catching banners up at the north east corner of the church yard to attract passers-by to what's going on at Christ Church. They are done, have begun to be used and are great.

We said we wanted an internal electronic noticeboard. We have yet to achieve this. Offers of help?

Next we said we wanted to set up a Bereavement Support Service. Thanks to Chris Larkman, Clare Gummet and their team, we have achieved this. This is a major piece of work and a great asset to the community. It is already well used and is growing. We express our gratitude to each of those who have volunteered to undergo the training and offer this vital service both to our own congregation, our neighbouring church congregations and the wider local community.

We wanted to set up a series of events specifically with our growing number of young families in mind. As we know well at Christ Church, it is a Church of England rule that 'young' is defined as anyone younger than the vicar (or thereabouts.....) so there are lots of you! This is an area that still needs work and something for the new PCC to set its powerful mind to after this morning.

Equally, we have not been able to set up our proposed monthly sermon discussion forum. Working out the best time and day for this has proved problematic. It may well be that our new small groups will prove to be the best place for these discussions. I would welcome feedback and advice.

We said we wanted to set up a new Film Group. The first meeting will be this Tuesday at 7.30pm in the Truman Room. Come and find God or at least the quest for salvation in John Ford's 'The Searchers', questions for discussion at the cross aisle.

We said we wanted to set up a children's singing group and Richard Hall has achieved this. The Children's Choir is already making a valuable contribution to the worship of the whole church. I'd like to express my especial gratitude to Richard who continues to be a fine Director of Music and to members of the adult choir who support Richard not least in making sure that we meet our safeguarding obligations to the children.

We said we wanted to undertake an audit of gifts amongst the congregation and this remains to be completed.

Finally, we said that we would review our mid-week worship. After consultation and some experimentation, we have settled on a weekly service at 11.00am every Tuesday morning.

I'm really impressed that the PCC and other members of the congregation have achieved so much in such a relatively short space of time. We will need, during the coming 12 months to review our action plan and decide on whether we want to add to it in the light of so much of the existing plan having been achieved.

Elsewhere there is much to celebrate. We are awash with junior servers, Junior Church is flourishing, and there are rug rats everywhere.

Our electoral roll has expanded and Christ Church is growing. I **think** the electoral roll reported this morning is the highest it has been during the whole time I have been vicar here, and we are pretty vigorous in removing from the list people who no longer worship with us at all. We are not a mega-church nor do we want to be one. We are not experiencing a revolution but our number is growing and more people are arriving with us than are leaving. We need to encourage those new arrivals to adopt something like as generous an approach to giving to church as some of those departed but this is a long term work in progress.

Finally in this little litany of goodness, our Lent project of inviting members of the congregation to offer 6 pictures of the places/people/experiences that communicated something of their relationship with God was a great success. This Photo-Voice project led to some brilliant evenings of profound sharing of where God is to be found in our lives. I commend and thank each of the courageous 26 participants who were willing to take the risk of sharing something deep about themselves and their faith. When we do it next year (probably not Lent but at some other point in the year), let's try to double the numbers willing to join in.

And so to the Building Development Project. This has been a year of very encouraging and relatively swift progress. We are on track, on time, on budget and ready to go!

During the past twelve months, Heads of Terms were agreed with the Diocese and a sum of £1.1 million negotiated for the sale of part of the existing hall site to the Diocese for the new vicarage. In the autumn we held a series of presentation mornings for our neighbours and at the end of 2014 all of the hard work of the year was rewarded when the PCC voted to approve and submit the planning application for the scheme to the London Borough of Merton Planning Department. In March of this year planning permission was granted without a single objection having been lodged with the council. We are especially pleased to have so carefully shared our plans with our neighbours that each of them is at least content with the scheme. Since then work has moved apace and our architect Geoff Crowther has been working hand in glove with the Building Development Committee to appoint the necessary consultants, to draw up the detailed construction design and to fulfill the planning conditions attached to the granting of planning permission. We have been working on the landscaping plans, starting to discuss what each room in the new building will need and what materials we want to use. What lies ahead is securing a faculty to permit the attachment of the glass link between the existing church building and the new development, the legal transfer of land, agreeing the terms of the construction contract and then going out to tender to construction companies before works begin. We have promised our neighbours that works will not commence on site any earlier than September 1st but we are hoping to begin work by the end of September or early October. However, as we have experienced on a number of occasions over the five years of the life of this proposal, there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip and, to mix my metaphors, we never count our chickens until they are hatched. The PCC know well enough that there is always the possibility of delay and we will keep members of the congregation informed about every stage in the unfolding story. We are, in Churchillian terms however, I believe, at the beginning of the end! Our hope is that once construction begins in the autumn, the works should take 12-15 months to complete.

Well that's just about all from me. I hope that by the time this report is delivered next year you will hear of ground breaking, foundation laying, the delights of the posh port-a-loos and just look at all that mud!! We shall see. Wherever we've all got to, God will be with us because God is always with us. We are blessed at Christ Church and we need to remember to count the blessings we receive each day, even when it doesn't feel like an especially good one. We have been given so much; let us not forget to use what we've been given, to serve.

Thank you.