

Christ Church West Wimbledon APCM 2016 – 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. This year though, I probably need not only to thank them but to writhe before them in an agony of apology, abasement and mortification. As you will all, I hope, know by now; on June 12th I'm off to pasture's new in Forest Hill and this means that the dread word 'interregnum' falls with a deathly thud into the laps of our esteemed church wardens.

That said, there really are not two other members of the congregation that I, nor you, could wish to have in place as our wardens at this time.

They are a great team; committed, loyal, energetic, sensitive and creative. Even if the congregation goes singing and dancing with joy into the sunset at the news of a vicar's departure, no warden ever really enjoys the extra work, responsibility and meetings that interregna entail. As I've said before and think I'll probably be saying again before I'm done this morning, Sal and Julie merit your unwavering encouragement, support, love and chocolate.

No-one to thank this morning as far as stepping down PCC members are concerned. All remain in harness and probably, at this time of so much other change, a degree of stability here is no bad thing. I do however, want to say a few words about our retiring Treasurer, Godfrey Banks, a co-opted member of the PCC. When we were speaking about his moment of stepping down, Godfrey let it be known in no uncertain terms that he didn't want church funds wasting on fripperies like 'thank you' presents! So being a good, serving vicar who follows his people in all things..... I haven't bought him anything on behalf of the PCC. Nor have I bought Flis anything who has been Godfrey's right hand woman through the thick and thin of his time as treasurer. Not permitted to spend PCC money on him, I am left simply to appeal to the good folk of Christ Church to express their gratitude to Godfrey in beer, gin, flowers, chocolates or other lovely things in a completely non-PCC personal capacity. To that end, Godfrey and Flis will now, please accept these small things from me personally (these will not, I promise appear on any expenses claim) and a hearty round of applause from us all.

Now, there is going to be time aplenty for lachrymose or relieved farewells further down the line and so this morning, I want to concentrate on what this occasion is supposed to be about and review the events of 2015.

As I hinted in the announcement of my new post, I have been feeling the call onto new things for the whole of 2015 and looking back I think this has certainly affected the energy or lack thereof which I've been able to put into new initiatives. They have been few in 2015.

We set up our small groups and they, with one exception have launched and are flourishing. These now need to embed and grow and I hope very much that they will be nurtured after I've gone.

We held our annual stewardship drive and as part of that encouraged members of the congregation to say how they would like to be more involved in church life. The response to this invitation was limited to fewer than ten members of the congregation. I hope that any new vicar will want to keep the need to communicate effectively with the congregation firmly to the fore.

Even though we have not been awash with new initiatives, there has been much good in the year. Last year I wrote and said

"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

vigourous 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.”

This has also been true in 2015. With 234 members on a rigorously trimmed electoral roll, we are a larger church community this morning than at any time in the last 13 years. At our APCM in the year of my arrival, 2003, the electoral roll stood at 167. We are still growing and I very much look forward to hearing how the new vicar has re-energised parish life and that Christ Church has grown again.

Some of you may feel that because the old hall is still there, as there are no diggers outside, as the merry sound of Slavic toiling cannot be heard on church turf all means that progress on the Building Development has been slow. Well, if you thought that, you'd be right. Last year I wrote/said

“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”.

Having been constructively assertive with Diocesan officials, agreement on the middle two of those four things was reasonably straightforward. However, in seeking to secure the necessary faculties, we were hijacked by a depressing and I think accidental confluence of casual Victorian Society objection, Registry Office dilettantism and a failure by everyone at Trinity House to warn us of the possible disruptions that parties such as the Victorian Society can cause to a project such as ours and a subsequent failure on our part to engage them soon enough in the permission seeking process.

That all said, it is my pleasure to report that as of this morning, ALL of those aforementioned steps have now been taken and we are now going out to tender to an array of construction companies. Last April, I said that I hoped we'd have 'spades in the ground' by last October.....this April, I really, really hope and expect that we'll be able to begin the construction phase of the project by the end of July by which time the proposed new heating system will have been installed and the way will be clear, at last, to get on with it!

In the meantime, we can give thanks for and joyfully celebrate what Richard is doing with both the children's and adults' music, give thanks to Becky Neal for her heroic maintenance of the Bruno Bear Club down at the West Wimbledon Hall on Thursdays, give thanks for Tish and the Social Committee and the wonderful 'feel' they all give to events at church, give thanks for all the young people preparing for communion, singing, serving, making and contributing their wonderful noise, give thanks for our elderly women and men who don't/can't 'do' much in terms of rotas or committees but whose prayer and presence deeply enrich our life together, give thanks especially for Betty Cutchey and Dawn Stageman and their years of faithful service here, expressed with overwhelming generosity in large legacies left to Christ Church, they are examples to us all; give thanks for the strength of this community which in little ways beyond describing by the vicar in his annual ramble, contribute to making us, making you who we/you are.

If I've achieved anything here at all in the last thirteen years it will have been to inherit that special Christ Church 'thing' from those giants upon whose shoulders I have climbed and been able to pass it on to whoever comes next without having broken it. Give thanks for that.

We will have a chance to party and say good bye on June 4th and 12th but for now, at my last annual parish meeting, thank you all very much for thirteen wonderful years.