



All Saints Church

W O K I N G H A M

Rector's report on 2018 to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting April 2019

Like last year's address I want to be mainly future focussed in what I say this morning. You do have an account of the major happenings of the year in the Annual Review of the Church Council and the summary pages of its Annual Accounts. Also once again this year I have written a preface to the Annual Review which gives you my take on an overview of 2018. This invited readers to reflect on how the activities of the church and in the church have an impact for good in our lives and others' lives beyond the church walls and outside of our weekly gatherings.

So, in this address I want to focus on the future again but first look at how we have responded to the seven areas I called out at the last APCM as areas of concern which we might want to be thinking more about as a church.

The first one was poverty. I mentioned specifically child poverty at the APCM. However, this last year we have been drawn as a church to look at homelessness and specifically rough sleepers. Our concern was high because we realised that we needed to decide about the use of our outbuildings in the churchyard by rough sleepers. The PCC concluded that allowing these buildings to be used in this way was not the right way to serve either the rough sleepers or the community around us. The use of the bier shed had created a public health hazard and managing that situation was an unreasonable expectation on our church officers and volunteers. The outbuildings are very soon to be cleaned out and made secure. This decision by the PCC was not made lightly because we are aware of the needs of rough sleepers and want to show Christian compassion. So the PCC decision was accompanied by a commitment to do more to help rough sleepers in the town. We began by inviting Capt. Jan Howlin to speak to the PCC about the work the Salvation Army do in the town. This proved very informative and inspiring to the PCC and others of the congregation who were invited to attend this open meeting. It resulted in the first instance in the PCC donating to the Salvation Army's work with the homeless from the flexible portion of the charitable/mission giving tithe we levy on our net income as church. Early in 2019 several members of our church responded to an invitation from the Salvation Army to all churches to come together and consider setting up a winter nightshelter programme in Wokingham using church halls for the winter 2019/2020. Our conversations on this have continued; some 20 members of the church have attended the ongoing meetings and my hope is that we will be able to offer The Cornerstone one night of the week and provide volunteers to help make the Wokingham scheme viable.

I remain hopeful that we will respond more locally to the challenge of child poverty as a church this year. As a church our fund-raising and prayer support for the work of The Children's Society and various Mothers' Union programmes does mean we are contributing to the work these superb agencies are doing nationally to tackle poverty among families with children. I am a member of a small Churches Together steering group planning to mount a travelling exhibition across Wokingham Borough to act as



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a catalyst to churches, Christians and others interested to take more action to tackle this growing scourge in our community. In conjunction with a Children's Society national campaign this group was instrumental in persuading Wokingham Borough Council to waive council tax for care leavers under 25 years old. This gives those young people relief from a major source of stress and potential debt that other young people who have secure family support rarely have to face. Also as you can read in The Cornerstone team's Report to this meeting, members of the Cornerstone team were involved in setting up and now are supporting on the committee the Wokingham School Uniform project run by local charity First Days, which is focused on alleviating the issues faced by young families living in poverty. Although Wokingham is less affected by child poverty than other areas of the country, the numbers are going in the wrong direction. The strapline of the CTW steering group is "one child living in poverty is one child too many". We do see the impact of poverty and multiple deprivation on the struggles facing children and their teachers at our church school and our school governors, led by Steve Smith, PCC member and chair of governors, are keenly aware and highly supportive of the school in its commitment to inclusion and seeing every child supported to make the most of the education offered.

Last year I expressed a desire to go further with Christian nurture groups. By this I meant those opportunities for adults looking to take early steps of igniting, or re-igniting, an exploration and understanding of Christian faith and becoming a disciple of Christ. For most of the year 2018 with a vacancy on the clergy team we held back on nurture or beginner groups, though there were development or study groups held in Lent and Advent 2018. John Boylan's support with these is greatly appreciated. Towards the end of 2018 as Bishop Steven's influence across the diocese began to gain traction we responded as a ministry team to his invitation to gather with other clergy to look at catechesis – the old name he wishes to renew, for helping one another to enter into and grow in Christian faith. John Boylan and myself were able to attend this day. The learning from it has also been shared with the PCC at one of its recent meetings, and I have spoken about it in a sermon. The ministers' team are working on a plan for the whole of the 2019/2020 session which will include both nurture groups and focus study groups in Lent and Advent ; providing a plan for the whole year, well trailed in advance so that people can be invited and encouraged to attend and have a clear sense of what these courses will offer for them.

Last year I spoke about leadership. We can sometimes be a bit daunted by the notion of leadership in the church context; thinking that maybe we are somehow not good enough to be Christian leaders, even though many of us are leaders in our Monday to Saturday lives. We see many examples of leadership at All Saints, with many aspects of both our mission in the community and our pastoral and teaching missions led by members of the church. It is important that we do support one another, and I am conscious that there is more we can be doing. Some elements of support in this regard stalled in 2018 because of both the clergy vacancy and the



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changes in the Parish Office. We are now in a stronger position and I am planning to make sure this year that we do complete the Volunteer Policy that PCC commissioned over a year ago now. I am also conscious that we place a lot of responsibility on a small number of us who take a leading role in our youth and children's work and there are members of the church who have done this for many years very faithfully and consistently creatively. I would want to make sure that we are reviewing this year how well we are supporting them and how we are encouraging others to join in with this vital work. It is encouraging that we have seen new members of that team join in 2018.

Last year I also mentioned the need to encourage more lay leaders of worship; and more women, especially younger women, in leadership particularly in the public worship of mixed congregations of men as well as women and children. We have a priest who is a woman ; we have some wonderful leaders of intercessions too and we have some very inspiring leaders of worship in our residential care home services and in our Messy Church team. I'd like to see more opportunities for lay leadership of worship generally, including women, in the larger services in church.

Last year we had empty seats on the PCC and a poor gender balance on the PCC. I am delighted that now we have a full slate of PCC members and we have gone a long way to redressing the male/female balance as well as lowering the age profile slightly.

Last year I referenced the Church of England report Setting God's People Free. I said it seems to be slowly cooking away and rising through people's consciousness. It offers a valuable perspective – about being Christian in our Monday to Saturday lives, about confident Christian faith; and about equality of worth and status with complementarity of gifts and calling for mission as between laity and clergy. I asked what can we do to study this report and let it question us as a church? Although the PCC did look at it we have yet really to answer my question as a church. I would like to see us doing that in 2019.

Last year I talked about being a contemplative church - one of the three Cs of the diocesan vision of us as a contemplative, courageous and compassionate church. I had been struck by the rich seam of thoughts and ideas that came out of the Lent study group in early 2018 about being a contemplative church. I linked it with a big question I perceive is in front of us now as a church about our awareness , our understanding and our confidence as a church about how we worship at All Saints, why we do what we do, and what we might be doing going forward. This question was given some particular focus by concerns expressed during the year by some church members especially about the music support for the 9.30am service with a smaller number of both adults and children in the regular Sunday morning choir. My sense was then and is stronger now that we do need to allow ourselves to be challenged and questioned by reflection on what worship is really all about? It would be a missed opportunity if we focussed simply and only on the question of the choir –



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the issues arising around choir numbers point us to bigger questions about how our largest weekly gathering for worship as a church for the Eucharist should be evolving and developing and including the role and place of music in that worship. So I am inviting us all to get involved in the sessions Inspiring Music in Worship, the first one will take place on Saturday 27th April. The course is for everyone who comes to church at All Saints. The course recognises that firstly it is important to look at what it means to be a worshipping person. So, the first session considers what worship is and how we use music in worship. The course goes on to look at discovering skills and releasing gifts with the aim of encouraging the engagement of every member of the congregation in worship. There is a section on how inspiring worship can be the key to effective mission. The course then leads us into evaluating our current worship and goes on to help us develop our vision for our music and worship.

One thing that we will be very conscious of is that at some point in 2020, sooner rather than later I hope, we will not be able to worship in the church for a few months, and our services will take place in The Cornerstone. This may be the single biggest learning opportunity for us about the essentials of worship!

Last year I posed a question about the mental health of the church community. We hear a lot about the importance of mental health for individuals, but what about the mental health of the church as a community – what about our mental health at All Saints. As a church we are in danger of being driven by anxiety – which is general throughout the Church of England at present – anxiety that we are not growing, anxiety about money, about numbers, about children and young people. Certainly this year in society more widely there have been many things to be anxious about - not least the divisions created in our country by the Brexit issue; but in addition the terrible toll of knife crime in our big cities; the rise in homelessness, mental health issues among children and young people; and the dangers of drug abuse also among young people and children. During this the call upon churches I feel is to turn away from obsession with our internal anxieties and seek to be faithful to our calling in Christ. It is refreshing that the vision of the Diocese of Oxford places its emphasis on churches seeking to become more Christlike – through being more courageous, contemplative and compassionate; rather than focussing on organisational goals of growth or income. These are important of course but it is when we turn to meet Christ in the community around us and respond to the community in those ways that we will if God is gracious, see growth and in numbers and in resources.

Last year I asked us to reflect more on community development. It was a question mainly about responding to the new housing estates and how we would work with our new Associate Priest Hannah Higginson when she arrived. Well Hannah is now well and truly here and she is beginning to develop contacts and relationships with residents of those new estates, especially the largest one Montague Park, and including the new Montague Park primary school where she has led collective worship and also contributed to RE lessons; and through her contact with the school



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I also have led a collective worship session there. I am sorry that we were not able to fix the APCM date and time this year to avoid it clashing with the 11am Family Service so Hannah cannot be here for the whole meeting. Progress on Hannah's work with the new community areas of our town will be reported to you in other ways through the year; and I intend next year's APCM will avoid a clash with a service somehow.

Finally, but not least the single biggest project for the coming year for us as a church is making Community Church 2020 happen. It is understandable to be daunted by the scope and size of the challenge of this project for us. I want to encourage you, every one of us to be brave, to have faith and to be excited about this. We have been given an amazing opportunity to be part of the biggest change in our church building for perhaps a century. It will bring new life to us as a worshipping community and give even more opportunities for the community as a whole to be part of the life of the church. It is as I said last year much more than a building project, but without changing the building we cannot enable the new things that people will want to be doing in the church both in terms of worship and community support and gathering; without changing the building we cannot enable the new things God will be doing with people here in Wokingham now and in the future. Yes, CC2020 is a large ambitious vision in its entirety. I believe firmly and unequivocally what we have now is the right vision, and this is the right time. It is extravagant if you like; as I said in my sermon this morning the gospel message tells us God is extravagant; let us be extravagant in our mission, in our welcome and in our vision for the future of God's church in this place.

Finally, the Rector's address is a time to say thank you. 2018 was like 2017 in that there have been some considerable logistical as well as pastoral challenges in the year. We began the calendar year saying goodbye to our long-time Parish Administrator Jo Asplin. And it has taken us 3 rounds of appointment to find Carolyn whom I hope and pray will stay with us for a while. I do want to say thank you publicly again for the support in the office given to us by Janet Alp who stepped up as interim administrator during the vacancy and has graciously continued in her role working with Carolyn and with the Cornerstone team as Assistant in the office. Many of the challenges of the year as ever have fallen upon our two churchwardens Clive and Geoff; and also, on the other members of our PCC Standing Committee, Anne and Jon. I am delighted that Jon Helyer, PCC member joined its Standing Committee later in 2018 and has already been a great support to us. I'd like to record my deepest appreciation for that PCC Standing Committee team.

Thank you to Pat Axford who has stepped down as required by the rules after 6 years on PCC. Pat has done too many things in that role alone to enumerate in those 6 years. Her help with issues around buildings and appointment of staff has been invaluable and greatly appreciated, but those practical matters are only a part



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of the wisdom Pat has brought. She is still very much part of the CC2020 team, and we are very pleased about that!

Also, I thank Jennifer Pierce who steps down from PCC this year, yet continues to offer her support in other ways to the church's work in the parish including as a member of the Messy Church team.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks too to the team of ministers who continued their support of the church for 10 months of 2018 when we did not have an Associate Priest– Colin James, John Boylan, and youth leader Jason Bowles. It was a great delight to welcome The Revd Hannah Higginson to the ministry team as our new Associate Priest at All Saints-tide and already it feels she has been part of the team for much longer so well does she work with us here.

I'd like to thank all our staff members as well as Jason for their work for us during 2018; Richard Smith our Director of Music, Janet Alp as Office Assistant, Monica Martin and Derisley Brittain in The Cornerstone; and our Finance Officer Alan Nolan; and welcome our new Parish Administrator Carolyn Adams.

In the Cornerstone I'd like to thank Judi Arnold for her continuing work as Cornerstone Manager for her time and her leadership going forward.

There are of course so many people who could be thanked – let us show our appreciation and gratitude for one another and all our respective gifts and callings by the respect and attention we offer to each other in the way we live and serve together as a church community in the coming year.

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