



St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth
The Church of England and The Methodist Church in Partnership

Remarks of the Priest in Charge
Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2008

I am aware from personal experience of having been a 'normal person' myself in the past, that when a new parish priest arrives, all sorts of thoughts and feelings to do the rounds – there is anticipation as well as, perhaps, trepidation and anxiety – just to mention a few.

The sense of anticipation will be on all sides: Wardens and Stewards, regular congregation and those on the margins, not to mention the priest them self!

There will be anticipation for new beginnings and new possibilities. Questions around what the new person will offer by way of patterns of worship and witness, study and preaching are often in the air. In addition some will wonder how the new person will be a personal resource to those who gather for worship regularly, as well as those who have connection with the church in a rather more sporadic manner. People ask, "How will the new person help me to live and grow in my faith?" "How will they encourage me, challenge me, draw me closer to God, or model a pattern of living that reveals God to me and those who have contact with our church?"

Anticipation is often mixed with trepidation: Will the new person listen? Will the new person get to know us? Will the new person get to know me? What will stay? What will go? How will the new person decide? Will St. Mary's stay the same? Will it be taken in a direction that I don't like?

New beginnings bring new possibilities... and my hope is that, thus far, what you have seen of me will reassure you in some areas, challenge you in others and make you ponder and wonder in still others.

I was really excited at the prospect of coming to Rickmansworth: my first parish, a new parish, a positive and active parish. I was hopeful as to how I might grow in ministry here, as well as how I might help others to do the same. I was hopeful as to the possibilities of working with new colleagues and learning from them, as well as sharing something of my experiences with them and seeing how we might develop new patterns of ministry together. I was looking forward too, to linking again more closely with a local church school and discovering how the church and school might link together to support children in their spiritual development.

I have used the phrase, *I was*. This might lead you to think that whilst I was looking forward and that I was hopeful, maybe I have been disappointed in some way. Actually, this is far from the truth. Disappointed is something I certainly am not... I am really glad to be here, and really glad to be with you as a community here.

In arriving at St. Mary's, and having been thrown into the deep end with a Civic Service on my first Sunday here and then within the first six months the two major festivals of the Christian Year – Christmas and Easter – I have been gladdened and encouraged by the help and support I have received from all quarters. There is much that goes on behind the scenes – the 'quiet getting on' that helps things to happen so that others might come and receive in this place and not even need to think or worry about who makes them happen. Sometimes it is hard to find out who makes things happen so that they can be thanked – so to all of those of you who do the 'quiet getting on' so that others may receive from this place – thank you.

During this first six months, there has been much listening and looking – amidst all the major services that have taken place: conversations with people about their hopes for the future, as well as hearing their memories of the past. The 'come and talk to me' occasions afforded opportunity to meet people in a more informal setting, with the most popular place for meeting proving to be Cafe Nero. I am not certain what the other customers made of us descending on the place, though! I shall put some more into the diary, and although some may feel that they didn't actually share that much of the history of this place, or get much of an opportunity to talk to me – the fact that people came and talked to one another was, I felt, just as important.

During this time, I have met with people involved with various aspects of work across the life of our church, and I am aware there are still more to go – don't worry, I haven't forgotten you! A highlight has been dinner with the Bellringers, as well as the conversations one has on the street or in the supermarket as people get to know me. In addition, some have come to see me to talk through personal and pastoral issues, and this work, close to my heart, gives the chance to share with people in a more intimate setting and hear something of how God is working, or seeking to work in their lives. Regular meetings have taken place with the members of the staff team as well as Wardens and Stewards – and these have been important 'touch-stone' meetings during the early months of arriving.

Today's meeting is an opportunity to say, publicly, how grateful I am to all those who have supported me in my first months here at St. Mary's and offer thanks for the help I have received. It is always dangerous to single people out, as others may feel left out. I want you all to feel thanked and appreciated, because I do thank and appreciate you. There are however, some people who have had to bear something more of the burden of having a 'new girl in town'.

On this occasion I offer my thanks particularly to:

Lindsay Campbell, who beavers away in the Parish Office and copes when I have a minor flap (thankfully there have been no major ones yet!) as well as picking up many issues raised by visitors to the Church Centre and church generally. Lindsay has been a mine of information, and it has been good to have lots of questions to which we have both needed to find out the answers so that we can discover together.

In David Jeffers we are immensely lucky to have such a diligent, rigorous and hard working Sacristan. To have someone around working so hard to ensure everything is ready for Sunday services as well as the Occasional Offices of Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals is such a bonus. David sets up, clears away, keeps the vestry and church tidy – as well as remains on hand for the various questions and wonderings I may have. I am very grateful to him for all his work and help.

The Wardens and Stewards have worked hard to be a support to me in the first months of my ministry here at St. Mary's and I am grateful to them for their wisdom and advice when I have needed to find out 'how things have been', as well as their enthusiasm and encouragement for new ideas and new possibilities. I am looking forward to working with them in the coming year, as well as the newly elected members to Council. The work we have to do is important in listening to the congregation whom we serve, as well as the wider community in which we work and seek to share the kingdom. I hope all members of council will be present for the simple Commissioning ceremony within the Eucharist next Sunday morning.

Lastly, I offer my thanks to the members of the Staff Team – Phil, Anne, Michael, and Chris Jones. They have been both a support in services, as well as behind the scenes in sharing their experience of the community here. They have been willing to share their own hopes, explore new ideas, in addition to talking through the implications of changes that may need to be explored in order for us to move forward in certain aspects of the life of the church here in Rickmansworth.

To end on a rather more personal note: I am sorry that I am unable to be at the meeting today – what would have been my first APCM. I am sure you will appreciate that the need to be with my father is one that is important to me and my family. My father's illness has been very sudden and the journey towards his death has come very quickly and suddenly. I am grateful for the prayers that have been offered for him and for me – I know that you will continue to be supportive and generous in your care. This is the nature of the community I have found at St. Mary's, and I am grateful for it.

With my thanks to, and prayers for, you all.

Deborah Snowball
Priest in Charge of Rickmansworth

20th April 2008