



Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

**Annual Parochial Church Meeting
25th April 2010**

Report from the Priest-in-Charge

As with my Report last year, I return to the key words of the Sermon I preached on my first Sunday here at St. Mary's – now some two and a half years ago: affirm, illuminate, summon. It is these words that I would like to use again as the shape and basis for my Report today, exploring something of where the Holy Spirit has led us thus far, and where we might be led on.

The first word: **Affirm**

In this section, I begin, as always it is important each year so to do, by saying thank you.

Firstly to my colleagues in Ministry: Phil and Michael. I am grateful to each of them, as I am sure you are, for their continued ministry in our church and my thanks are offered to them both for their support to me personally. A significant departure during the year from the Staff team came with Anne's retirement. It was a delight that so many people came to her Retirement Service, to pray for her, to wish her well and to offer their thanks for her ministry here over such a significant period of time. As you will know, Phil Osborne is to leave the Watford Circuit this year. His Farewell Service will take place here at St. Mary's on the evening of 18th July, when members of the Churches from across the Circuit will come to give thanks for all that Phil has contributed to the life in the local area. As you will appreciate, Anne's retirement and Phil's departure change the shape of the ministry Team here at St. Mary's significantly – and this is something to which I shall return in due course.

You will know that, at this particular gathering, I like to take the opportunity to thank different 'groups' and people within our community. Last year it was those who contributed directly to the preparation and execution of our worship: Sacristans, Servers, Choir and Organist, Bellringers and Sidespeople. This year, I highlight the work of those whose work goes on a little further behind the scenes to ensure that our Church – both building and people – is well cared for so that worship and life may continue in the well ordered fashion that is one of the hallmarks of life of St. Mary's. (Well, for the most part anyway!)

So, I begin with those who take time to share in cleaning our Church – dusting, vacuuming and polishing brasswork. When I came to have a look at the parish before I was interviewed, the care that has been shown for our beautiful Church building over many years, and that continues to be shown was, and continues to be, evident. We have people of all ages who share in the task – from seven year-olds to those in their seventies: thank you to you all. Thank you too to those who came and lent a hand in the Spring Cleans that took place last summer.

In addition to those who clean the church are those who beautify it – our Flower Arranging Team. In recent weeks, with the glories of Easter, the church looked stunning, with all the lilies on display. At major festivals, all the stops are pulled out to ensure the church looks suitably festive – to reflect the glories of the season in hand. A few new members have joined the team recently, working alongside those who have been arranging for a while – and many hours are spent buying flowers and then arranging them, as well as watering the arrangements in between Sundays. Some of you may know of the forms in Church which can be filled in – and a donation made towards the cost of flowers for a special occasion – perhaps a significant birthday, a Wedding Anniversary or the anniversary of someone's death. I warmly encourage you to consider making a contribution towards the flowers in this way. So to our Flower Arrangers: thank you.

Another person to whom I would like to offer thanks on this occasion – relating to behind the scenes – as she prints our pew leaflet each Sunday, ensures Wedding and Funeral Registers are completed, and, due to the vagaries of the photocopier - has spent many hours out-of-hours producing our new Service Books for this year, is Lindsay Campbell. Many people experience Lindsay's calm and gentle proficiency, and are grateful for the quiet manner in which tasks are undertaken in the Parish Office. Much confidential information passes Lindsay's way as Parish Secretary, and it is to her credit that people know she is

someone who can be trusted. Lindsay undertakes many tasks that not even I know of, and that others assume will be done, but never know by whom, so to Lindsay, thank you.

And, for all of the rest of us, who worship Sunday by Sunday, coming faithfully to offer our thanks and praise to the living God who is always the first to affirm us, and who do many other things around the church, my affirmation comes for you continues in praising you for manner of your welcome to friends and strangers alike, and for your continued prayer for the many and varied areas of our church life.

As I say to so many people when they ask me to describe St. Mary's, we do see ourselves very much as the Parish Church. You can see the figures here for the various Occasional Offices For members of the parish and beyond, over the past year there have been: 18 baptisms (including 1 adult); 12 Confirmations (6 young people and 6 adults); 3 children admitted to Communion; 5 couples married; 26 funerals (6 in church and 20 at the Crematorium). You will know, as well as me, that the last two years have seen the deaths of people who have given significant service to St. Mary's – we offer our great thanks to them as they are now part of the 'great cloud of witnesses' – continuing to remember in our prayers both their families and us their friends.

St. Mary's continues to serve the community through the Occasional Offices of Holy Baptism, Holy Matrimony and Funerals, personal to family and friends – but we, as a Church community also serve the wider community in worship through 'high profile' services such as the Service on Remembrance Sunday and the Christmas Services. These are often referred to as the church's 'Shop Window' and many people make a judgement by what they see and experience at these Services.

A Parish Church stands at the heart of the community – and it is the community both within our walls, and without, with we need to engage. The Reports you have in your Annual Reports document give credence to the wide variety of activities offered to our local community and I remain immensely grateful to all those who offer their time and talents to this wealth of activity. Into the future we need to understand more fully the changes we experience in our everyday lives outside the hours we worship and how they influence what we do and how we offer ourselves in service to the local community. This is an area of life which needs to be grounded in prayer and supported by clear and useful structures – and it is to this that I turn now.

My second key word: **Illuminate**

You will have caught glimpses through the pew leaflet, the website and Link the many and varied activities that have been on offer over the past year: social events; different Services; prayer meetings; activities for young and old alike.

Last year I spoke much of what was being offered for young people – building on what was already in place, as well as offering new things. This year has been similar in style. Some things have come, other things have gone – you will see that Little Angels stopped in the autumn as there were simply not enough children on a regular basis due to changing age groups.

For the older members of our community, we continue to offer the Lunch Club and Meet for Tea, the latter being started by Jean Moon, whose death we have recently marked. Services are also offered regularly in two of the local Residential Homes, and I am hopeful that the Services that used to take place at Westerley may begin again. Following the invitation to people to offer themselves as Befrienders, a number of people are being connected together so that those who are more isolated or less able to get out without assistance might be supported and offered friendship. There is much that is possible and much that could be done, some ideas are already being acted upon, others are waiting their time till the right person picks them up and turns with them... could any of these be for you?

One of the things I do most keenly is to listen: to the things being said by members of our church; to things being said by people loosely connected with the church; to the things that are being said by people who have no real connection at all. And with this listening comes the thinking as to how, as I suggested earlier, we understand more fully the changes we experience in our everyday lives outside the hours we worship and what influence they have on what we do and how we offer ourselves in service to the local community. I also suggested that this work of understanding needs to be grounded in prayer and supported by clear and useful structures.

For some time, I have been aware that United Church Council (UCC) is a large body – some twenty or so members if all are present – and that it would be useful for members to be engaged in discussion outside of the main Council meetings to further specific activities and discussion relating to them. To this end, following this APCM, in addition to the main bi-monthly meetings of the UCC, three Committees will meet in the intervening months to focus and consult on specific areas of the life of our church: Community and Outreach; Stewardship and Finance; Fabric and Churchyard. Each of these committees will be tasked with particular areas of focus – as each of the names suggests. It is my hope that through this structure, new and deeper understandings will be gained, and new and deeper expertise and commitment given.

As members of the Body of Christ, all of us have been given Gifts of the Spirit and so all of us have gifts and skills, ideas and knowledge that can be used to further the work of God in our community. Bringing light into each of our lives, illuminating what can and may be developed, and encouraging each of us to give, to join and to bring others with us my task, by virtue of my Office, but also the task for each of us, by virtue of our Baptism.

And this leads me on to the last of the key words: **Summon**

There are two particular foci for this key word and both relate to possibilities and commitment.

Jesus said to each of the disciples: follow me. The summons to serve, to use our gifts and skills in serving one another and to praise God is one offered by our generous and hospitable God. The summons, this invitation, I extend to you quite particularly with regard to the life of St. Mary's. It's not just about Sunday worship – although that is an important area of our life. It is also about what goes on during the week and behind the scenes and around the corners. If you have thought, "I'd like to know more about that", or "I could do that", then ask or offer. Unless you ask or offer, we won't know. Communities only grow and develop when people talk to one another – hence the Coffee Gatherings for Lent as an opportunity for people to have a chance to really talk. Thank you to those who hosted those events by the way... I understand a good time was had by all! So the first thing is, consider your time, consider your gifts and skills, consider what you could be doing, consider what you need help doing, and talk to me – or someone else who might be able to point you in the right direction.

The second 'summons' relates right back to Staffing issues. I invite you to join with me in giving serious thought as to how we might support the ministry of a Curate in this parish. As I wrote in the February issue of Link: I am delighted to say that Rickmansworth (and me!) is seen as being able to provide good and useful opportunities for someone in the first years of Ordained Ministry. The Diocese is keen for us to provide a post for a Curate in Training – indeed, if a house had been available, we could have had someone this summer.

We don't have a house: so what might be possible?

You may know of someone who has a property (a house or decent sized flat – probably at least 2 bedrooms) that they might be able to let us rent, or that they might like to let us use for free. You may have such a property yourself and would like to offer it as part of your Stewardship: I know of at least two other parishes where this happens at present – so such a suggestion is not as bizarre as it seems!

You may like to consider whether you would like to make a donation to the Church (now rather than in your Will – or as well as in your Will) – and gather some others with you to do the same – whereby we could put down a deposit on a property and pay off the mortgage over the coming years.

In addition to housing, will be some increase on our Parish share, but as my Training Incumbent said to me recently, people don't mind paying more if they feel they are getting value for money. I believe it was meant as a compliment to me!

Curates are not just another pair of hands: they can develop new initiatives and creative possibilities, as well as challenge and inspire with the latest theological thinking fresh from the wonders of theological training. I urge you to consider this matter prayerfully and to speak to me if you feel it is something you might be able to support practically or financially. St. Mary's offers a unique opportunity, by virtue of being a Local Ecumenical Partnership, and would be, in my opinion, a really good training Parish. Notice that I say Parish, because you, along with me, would be in the business of training!

So, as always, there is much for which can be thankful, there is much for which we can be hopeful, there is much for which to offer prayer and praise. I continue to be thankful for the love and prayer that support me in my ministry, that support the members of our church and local communities, and I urge and encourage you to affirm one another in faith, illuminate one another in love, and summon one another in hope.

The Reverend Deborah Snowball

25th April 2010