



St Mary the Virgin, Rickmansworth

Serving the whole community

Annual Parochial Church Meeting Vicar's Report

My Report at this gathering always focuses around the three key words: affirm, illuminate, summon. I return to them again each year as they remind us all of what Christian community is about. Sometimes we do it well, sometimes not so well, but we should never stop trying.

Affirmation: I always like to begin by saying thank you.

Firstly, to my colleagues in ministry: Scott and Richard. Scott continues to serve as our Associate Priest and I know many are grateful for his ministry. As we are no longer an LEP, it would be easy to think there is no need to thank Richard Lawson for his ministry. I know, however, many have appreciated both his ministry at St Mary's – and that of the many Methodist Ministers across the decades. I promise, Richard will be invited back to preach again at St Mary's in due course!

I would like to mention some others: Katrina and Karen in the Church Office who have spent many hours working on their own in isolation whilst the Church Centre has been closed.

One other person who, whilst not on the staff, might as well be for the amount of time she has spent at her computer on our behalf. Buzz Coster has spent literally hours at the keyboard uploading information and keeping the website up-to-date.

I usually take the opportunity afforded by this annual gathering to thank different people and 'groups' within our community. This year, though,

I want to thank those who have prayed for and supported the Local Ecumenical Partnership that came to a formal close on Easter Day this year. Many have looked at St Mary's with curiosity, asking how it was possible for members of the Church of England and The Methodist Churches to worship together. I have always replied, "Well, as everyone in my congregation says, 'We just get on with it!'" That was the truth, and it remains a truth, as we continue to worship together in this place as those who belong to not just the Church of England and Methodist Church but Roman Catholic, Baptist, and other Free Churches in the mix as well. Going forward I am sure that the charism of Ecumenism will stay alive at St Mary's.

My third thank you is to each and every member of St Mary's who has continued to worship, pray, and support St Mary's in so many different ways over this in last year as we have journeyed through the COVID-19 pandemic. It is testimony to the sense of community at St Mary's, that so many have sought to join worship online, via telephone and in person when the church has been open. As a community and household of faith, we have come through relatively unscathed, health-wise, relating to the pandemic although, as many will know, attendance in church since we have been able to come back has taken time to grow. I'm delighted that from this Sunday we shall have at least two services each Sunday, and I'm hopeful that, recognising we have all various protocols in place, still more others will make their way back to church as soon.

Worship and prayer are at the heart of all that we as Christians should be about. Alongside this is service. And so I turn to our second key word: **Illuminate**.

There is much that St Mary's does to support our local community: the Monthly Lunch Club; Meet for Tea; supporting our Uniformed Organisations: Rainbows, Brownies, Guides; our youth group; staffing the Collection Point for the local Credit Union; acting as Governors at St Mary's School; overseeing Christian Aid collections; donating to charities near and far through our charitable giving; setting up Monday Morning TLC for Carers and those for whom they care.

We know that so many of these came to a grinding-halt in March 2020 with the arrival of the first Lockdown across the UK. Our task now is to look to re-building a sense of community at both St Mary's and in our local community. Alongside our school, St. Mary's Church of England Primary School, we have a unique place within

the community of Rickmansworth and so there is much that we could do to expand our ministry and our sharing of the gospel.

You will recall that in our Mission Action Plan, our Vision has been:

- † To be a spiritual, prayerful and dynamic Church;
- † To be a welcoming, inclusive and joyful Church;
- † To be a Church serving the whole community.

and our Priorities have been:

- † Going Deeper into God: *To encourage each person to develop and grow in their relationship with God.*
- † Transforming Communities: *To become more involved, as a Church, in the community.*
- † Making new Disciples: *To explore the whole area of welcoming and nurturing and growing all of our Church family.*

For each of the MAP Goals, key goals have been identified – all of which have been relayed in LINK and are also on the website. To identify them here when we are altogether though:

- † To go deeper into God by developing a series of initiatives to assist our church strengthen and deepen the faith and understanding of our congregation.
 - *We have introduced Songs for the Journey, held Courses – such as the one on Mary and Lent Courses to explore our faith and witness.*
- † To transform communities by providing more support to our neighbours, particularly the elderly and those with young families.
 - *In addition to the Lunch Club and Meet for Tea, we started Monday Morning TLC in March 2020*
- † To make new disciples by offering events and activities to help attract and support newcomers.
 - *We have broadened the places where we were 'out there': Ricky Week, the Starlight Evening.*
 - *We worked hard to improve our welcome on Sunday mornings*
 - *We are live-streaming services which people are watching both on Sunday mornings and during the week. and so forth,*

We are renewing our Mission Action Plan and, following this evening's meeting, we will be sending out a link to an online survey (which will also be available in a paper version, worry not!) to ask the members of our church community and the wider community – as far as we can possibly spread it – how St Mary's is perceived – in different areas of our life. The results of this survey will inform our next Mission Action Plan: which will be built around the Five Marks of Mission:

- † To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- † To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- † To respond to human need by loving service
- † To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- † To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

There is much that we do to serve God already, and there is always more that we are invited to do.

Mission, as expressed by Rowan Williams is, *seeing where God is at work and joining in alongside*, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Mission is, as I see it, the task to which we need to commit ourselves in the coming months and years. St Mary's, in common with many churches of all denominations shapes and sizes, has seen a decline in numbers over the years – particularly in the under 50s, families, and children – and we, along with all these other churches, will have to focus our energy on building our numbers. God will not mind whether they are 4, 44, 74 or 104 years of age – all God will mind is that they know of God's presence in our world and in their lives.

We are each on a journey of faith – a journey which is never static, a journey along which there is more to see, more to explore, more to encounter. As you respond to the Survey, consider where you could be making a difference, where you could share your skills, where you could invite others to join in. *This is our faith, we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, we say as part of the Affirmation of Faith. It is my faith, your faith, our faith – let us join together to make it the faith of others.

The Reverend Deborah Snowball
27th April 2021