

# Vicar's Report April 2024

## 1. Thank you!

I like to begin my APCM reports by saying thank you to everyone who has given so generously of their time, skill, and goodwill. St Mary's is a dynamic church that is sincere in its welcome and joyful in its sharing faith. The love of Christ is very much at the heart of your service in this community.

A church with so many willing and able hands, and with such a wide range of activities makes it difficult (and probably unwise) to attempt to thank individuals so please accept my sincere "umbrella-style" thank you...

Thank you to everyone for the vital role you play in the ongoing life and witness of our church. I am deeply grateful for everything that you give to this church. I feel privileged to be among you as your vicar.

## 2. Mission

The first stage of my ministry among you has been mainly focussed on beginning to get to know you all and to develop my understanding of your lives together as a worshipping community and a church family. Visiting people has greatly helped me with this endeavour, and I am committed to an ongoing programme of visiting parishioners at home.

This initial period has also helped me to gain an initial understanding of how you operate collectively as an enterprising church and relate to the wider community. This has included learning and evaluating how the PCC works with its sub committees and volunteer teams as well as the members of the wider congregation. I am continuing to learn how the various components of St Mary's fit together and work collectively in forwarding the witness and mission of God's kingdom in this place. This process will of course be ongoing, as I continue to establish my ministry with you!

Alongside these steps, I have also begun to build up stronger links and a very positive working relationship with the staff and pupils of St Mary's Church of England Primary school and the new head teacher there Tasha Maxwell.

I am working closely with Tasha and the RE lead (Jo Lee) in continuing to develop how the church and school can best work together. Not only in terms of my going in and supporting the school, but also how the school can more fully engage and participate in the life of the church. One aspect of this has been the changing of the old pattern of school coming into church to allow greater family involvement throughout the year. The results of this have been very encouraging thus far with strong attendances at the school's Christmas and Easter services in church, and our Mothering Sunday service.

My involvement with the other (non-church) schools of our parish has mainly centred on Rickmansworth Park school where I take assemblies and have begun to establish links with the staff team, but such links take time to develop.

My main objective over the coming months, is to work closely with the Community and Outreach subcommittee.

This has been re-named the **Mission and Outreach** committee, reflecting a renewed emphasis on mission. I will now be meeting monthly (rather than bi-monthly) with this team, and I will also be inviting people to join it and share its work as needed.

We will begin by evaluating and then re-imagining the parish MAP (or Mission Action Plan) and then seek to facilitate and encourage new growth, exploring fresh missional initiatives

and encouraging the ongoing development of those current projects that have worked well for St Mary's so far. As part of this, I am keen to explore fresh expressions of church and community outreach. These explorations will include a major new initiative aimed at families and young people, that may be resourced by the generous endowment for mission bequeathed to St Mary's by the late Joan Martin. We are thankful for Joan's generosity, and also grateful for the other bequests that we have received this year, which will also greatly help our ongoing life and mission as church.

As part of this process of discernment and refocus, I will also be encouraging the formation of a separate Social & Community committee. This would free up the capacity of the Mission and Outreach committee and allow it to focus more fully on Mission, which I see as an urgent priority, in our seeking to grow this church and move forward.

The proposed new social committee may share some of its members with the existing Mission team and may also choose to meet on an ad hoc (rather than bi-monthly pattern), that can be mapped out by those who help to form it with me. We will appeal for potential new members to volunteer in the coming weeks.

I think St Mary's has strong potential for growth over the coming years and want to give it my best in seeking to realise this as fully as we possibly can, but nothing can happen without the help and encouragement of all our church members.

### **3. Worship and Spiritual**

Worship and prayer continue to be at the heart of our Christian life. I am encouraged by the faithfulness and commitment of our gathered congregation. I feel the present pattern and composition of our current Sunday morning worship is attractive and life giving and should therefore remain substantially as it is.

I will continue to make some modifications to the orders of service we are currently using, including making the liturgy more accessible for non-church goers at key strategic points of the year such as Christmas, Mothering Sunday, Easter, Harvest etc where there will be a strong emphasis on inviting newcomers to join us.

We acknowledge with grateful thanks the gifted and enriching musical contribution that Andrew Sykes has given our church over his long years of service. Andrew's retiring and relocation will of course have a huge impact on our Sunday worship. We are doing all that we can to recruit a new organist and director of music and to minimize the effect of Andrew's departure. We wish Andrew and Ann every blessing for their future.

The Lent groups and Lectio Prayer groups were all well received by those who joined them (despite the limitations of the course we used this year and absence of a proper vicarage!)

In addition to our well-established house groups, it is my intention to go on offering a monthly Lectio Divina prayer group. This bible based contemplative prayer will seek to create space for God's word to us as we go on discerning the right steps forward missionally and spiritually.

I have also met with the intercessors team to discuss prayers at our collective worship and make alterations that take their views into account. We would also welcome some additional volunteers for this key ministry.

I remain grateful for the contribution to our worship from our lay teams, including the 10:00 am service each third Sunday. These services will continue in the present pattern and remain a valued part of the rich varied worship of our church. I look forward to being able to meet with the lay worship team members at some stage to establish how I may more fully support and further enable their ministry.

#### **4. Children and young people**

Most of what I wanted to say at this initial point in my ministry about encouraging families and young people has already been covered. However, the important work of Children's Church should also be recorded with thanks.

Looking to the immediate future, the Children's church team will be working with me and the PCC in suitable improvements to the children's areas and resources within St Mary's. Specifically, the aim will be to make their presence more visible and appealing to newcomers, as part of our welcome and part of our promoting St Mary's as a church for all ages.

Again, new volunteers are always welcome, and anyone considering joining this ministry is encouraged to contact me to arrange an initial conversation with myself and our Parish Safeguarding Officer.

#### **5. Safeguarding and safer recruitment**

This essential priority in our life as church continues to be a growing responsibility for our PSO Hilary and her team.

I do not need to duplicate Hilary's excellent report but wanted to formally record my full cooperation and support in working with Hilary's team and the PCC in continuing to develop and uphold safe practice for all. This of course includes appropriate safer recruiting and safeguarding training and management of all volunteers.

As we begin to move into fresh expressions and new initiatives of missional engagement we will be guided at every stage by the Diocesan and CofE safeguarding guidelines and expectations of good practice. I will continue to work closely with Hilary and her team and give them my full support.

#### **6. Pastoral**

As noted earlier I am committed to an ongoing programme of visiting members of our church family, as I see that as an important aspect of the priest's pastoral role. That said, realistically, as the requests/expectations upon my time continue to grow, I will not be able to sustain carrying out visits with the frequency I was able to enjoy at the start of my ministry here, so please be patient!

We now have a larger lay pastoral team who can administer the sacraments and visit people who are unable to attend church services, and so this means home communion and pastoral visits can take place more frequently.

At the time of compiling this report one of the larger care homes in the parish (Riverside Lodge) has expressed interest in closer links with St Mary's and we will explore how that can be facilitated, including our taking a service there each month.

#### **7. Publicity and communication**

We have an excellent website and a brilliant parish administrator who facilitates a range of outgoing communications across the members of our church. The weekly letter out and pew sheets are important and useful ways of keeping in touch.

However, I am increasingly aware that the absence of a parish magazine does have an impact on the sharing of news and thinking and progress etc across the parish, and that something fuller is needed in this sense.

We are currently working on a quarterly (or tri annual) fuller news sheet to keep people abreast of developments, and I intend to explore how we can progress towards a more regular publication in the mid -to longer term future.

Publicity is also mainly via our website and Facebook pages, as well as posters/flyers displayed in and around church, and the occasional advert in the Rickmansworth News. I would be grateful if more of our members could pro-actively share the news on our Facebook page (training can be given), as Facebook does seem to reach a lot of people who might not choose to engage with us by any other medium.

Linked to this, I am also keen to explore how we might relay some of our services and events on Facebook and Instagram and YouTube, as this will boost our publicity, presence, and mission across the community (and further afield)

## **8. Ministry team (including ecumenical and collegial working)**

I am delighted that the Revd Scott Talbot has returned to a more regular ministry among us. Scott will be primarily covering periods when I am on leave but will also be with us at other times – depending on his commitments elsewhere.

I have begun to work more closely with our Rural Dean, Revd Simon Cutmore, and the chapter of Rickmansworth deanery. We are also more proactively meeting with our ecumenical partners across the town. I would envisage a greater degree of cooperation and sharing projects together as we move forwards.

We have already begun to explore a wider and more comprehensive ecumenical response to homelessness in our area and the provision of an emergency drop in shelter this coming winter. We are also looking to work as churches together for seasons such as Advent etc.

Simon and I will also be exploring how our parishes might work more closely in some areas including Holy Week and Easter and some potential, shared children's work - but I will take this first to the Mission and Outreach committee.

In summary, I think St Mary's church family should feel rightfully encouraged by all the hard work and goodwill of its volunteers and members. This church has an incredibly positive place in the hearts of our community, and there is widespread public goodwill, interest, and appreciation of our presence in this place.

There is much potential to be built upon. Please continue to pray for God's guidance and blessing as we seek to grow. Please keep sharing the good news of all that is happening here and invite others to join us. Please consider how your own gifts and skills can further build the kingdom of God in this place.

In the love of Jesus

Gary

Revd Gary Norman  
Vicar

28 April 2024