

May 2023 Edition 87

Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:8b-10)

The Vicar's Report to the APCM

There is little doubt when you read this year's Annual Report that we are gradually entering the post-Covid world. Of particular note are the many social and fundraising events that have taken place in the past year. These have involved not only the faithful Social and Fundraising Committee, but also a wide range of others. This has been a year when many of our celebrations have had a musical theme, and all those involved in music here at St Mary's have made significant contributions.

It has been a great joy to see Sunday Club thriving once again. We continue to experiment with All Age worship, yet it remains clear that Sunday Club is a mainstay for many of our families – something that the children enjoy and their parents value. Toddlers, too, reaches out in a different way to the many families in this area. We continue to be blessed with a good number of baptisms, a number with Toddler connections.

In this quinquennial year maintenance of the church building, hall and grounds has been as important as ever. It's easy to take for granted those things that are done when the rest of us are elsewhere, but there are so many who use their talents behind the scenes to ensure that we continue to be able to worship and gather in this place.

During the pandemic I discovered just how much work the wonderful serving teams undertake here at St Mary's – because there was so much that I ended up having to do myself. It is a delight to have so many individuals back on the various rotas, contributing to worship in many and varied ways.

As you will know only too well, it is always a risk to start thanking individuals, since someone important will inevitably get missed. So I want to say this. You are all valued. There is no one here at St Mary's

who isn't important or who could be replaced. And I do want to make it clear that it is not simply for what you do that you are valued, but also for who you are. The contributions each of you make are not to be measured, but rather to be treasured and cherished.

And in a sense that brings me to the outlook for the future.

This year the Parish Needs Process has come to the Epsom Deanery. This may not mean very much to you, but it is something that the PCC has discussed over recent months. Part of the Parish Needs Process is the Archdeacon's Visitation, which takes place here on 25th April. As well as the usual legalities, the Archdeacon of Dorking will discuss with me and the Church Wardens our Church Development Plan. This document seeks to set out our priorities for the coming years.

In one sense those priorities might seem quite obvious. They are grouped under the headings of:

1. Growing discipleship
2. Growing diversity
3. Growing community

This means that we focus specifically on the spiritual life of the community; on children and families within the community; and on reaching out to those who are within the parish, but not specifically a part of the church community. In the Church Development Plan the PCC has agreed that both House Groups and occasional courses are an important way in which we grow as disciples; that continuing to prepare children to receive first communion, developing All Age Worship, and considering how to maintain connections with the older children are priorities; and that communication including the website and social media are important ways to reach out into the wider community.

It strikes me, as we develop our plans for the future, that we are in need of balancing a few key qualities. The first is realism. It is my observation that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the church community. While some individuals have been able to enter the post-pandemic world and pick up where they left off, many have not. For some this is a result of re-evaluating priorities. For others it is the result of health or family issues. As we make plans for the future we need to be

realistic about what is possible, and what is not, with the resources we have available. Part of that resource is human, and part is financial. As David has already explained, we have been running deficit budgets for a number of years now, and that is not sustainable. In a nutshell, we either need to increase our income, or decrease our costs. There really isn't any alternative. And both have implications.

So that's the realism.

And yet we are Easter people. We need to be hopeful. And in order to be hopeful, we also need to be visionary. The future may need to look significantly different from the past. I understand that even saying that may sound frightening. In a world that seems to move so quickly, we rely on the stability of a church community. Nevertheless, change is an inevitable part of life. Not only that, but if we have valued all that St Mary's has offered over the past decades, it is incumbent on us to secure its existence for future generations.

My plea is that the coming year should be one of challenging ourselves as we discern our future direction. I am not seeking revolution. Do you remember how in the gospels we hear that those who wanted Jesus to bring about a political overthrow were disappointed?

We do need to be challenged, though, to recall what lies at the heart of our faith. This church serves a community of 8500 people, and at the moment it really is quite a small number who connect with St Mary's. It's important that we find ways to change that. And it seems to me that the best way to do that is to recall why we worship God; how knowing God transforms our lives; why it is that sharing God's love has the potential to transform the world.

If we return to our roots, I think we will be better able to see what might change, as well as what needs to stay the same.

I am proud to be Vicar of this parish. I am humbled by the love and dedication that I see here. And I am passionate that we need to share God's love more widely. To ensure that others are able to connect with the message of salvation. To believe that what we have found in God is something that others might find too.



May Services and Events

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| Sunday 7 | 08.00 | Holy Communion |
| | 09.30 | Sung Communion and Children's Groups |
| Sunday 14 | 08.00 | Holy Communion |
| | 09.30 | Sung Communion |
| | 18.00 | Evening Worship |
| Monday 15 | 19.30 | Knit & Natter Group in the Leverton Room |
| Wednesday 17 | 20.00 | PCC in the Cuddington Hall |
| Thursday 18 | 14.30 | Thursday Club Games Afternoon |
| | 20.00 | Ascension Day Holy Communion |
| Saturday 20 | 10.00 | Women's Group in the Cuddington Hall |
| Sunday 21 | 08.00 | Holy Communion |
| | 09.30 | Sung Communion and Children's Groups |
| Sunday 28 | 08.00 | Holy Communion |
| | 09.30 | Sung Communion |
| Wednesday 31 | 19.15 | Men's Group Carvery at the Hogsmill |

Morning Prayer is said in church every weekday morning at 9am

Everyone is very welcome