

Reverend Sue Ayling

A loving farewell party was held for Sue in St. Mary's church hall on Easter Sunday in 2010. It was a big 'thank you' from her friends and colleagues in the parish not only for her seven years of untiring work as Assistant Curate but also for her sixteen years' service before her ordination in 1998.



In 1948 Sue (and later her two brothers) were born in a house that overlooked the Oval Cricket Ground in Kennington. She remembers her mother Doreen saying when the doctor visited he was more interested in watching the cricket from their balcony than he was in them!

Sue's father Phillip was a fighter pilot in the RAF

and flew a Spitfire during the war in Malta and Italy. All three children went to Sunday school at St. Mark's, Kennington and Sue vividly remembers singing as they put their penny in the collection box "Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light, like a little candle burning in the night". When she

was 16 Sue heard a sermon about giving our lives to Christ and later walked round to the vicarage and told the vicar "I've come to tell you that I have given my life to Christ".

Like her mother and uncle before her Sue went to Grey Coat Hospital Grammar school in Westminster. She didn't get the grades to take up a University place and instead joined the Civil

Service, working in the Estate Office where she began a part time course at the City of London Polytechnic and gained a Diploma in Civil Law.

Sue was 19 and drawn to the Ministry but then met her husband at a Christmas office party and her life took a different path! They married in 1974 and moved to Worcester Park in that year and after a while Sue joined St. Mary's.

Barry Preece was the vicar and Sue remembers him with great affection "he was such an amazing vicar, he loved his cigarette and his glass of wine. He was not what you would think of as a typical vicar but he was very, very spiritual".

Barry profoundly affected Sue and many of the congregation as he shared his transformational experience that led to a renewal of his faith. Sue particularly remembers one meditation in church

where he repeated a verse from Isaiah 43

"You are precious in my sight and honoured and I love you".

Barry later became the Guildford Diocesan Adviser on Spirituality and is currently Chair of The Retreat Association.

While working full time at the Inland Revenue where Sue was responsible for advising Treasury Ministers on tax policy, involved in the Budget and seeing the legislation through the House of Commons, she was also very active in the church being on the PCC, running a House Group, organising Retreats and - as part of the TWYG activities - barbeques and sleepovers. The youth group sleepovers, duly overseen by both Sue and Peter Harvey, were held in the Side Chapel with the pews taken out. Sue delights in the lifelong friendships the teenagers formed during that time.

In 1987 her marriage ended and again Sue felt that God was calling her to the Ministry but was advised to wait by the Director of Ordinands. Eventually, in 1995 she began her 3 year training to become a non-stipendiary Priest.

After her ordination in 1998 Sue moved to St. Andrew's Oxshott where she was Assistant Curate until 2002. In 1999 she was ordained a Priest in the Diocese of Guildford and remembers it as a great time of celebration and joy. Barry Preece preached at her first service presiding at Holy Communion. She was awarded an OBE in 2002 for her work in the Civil Service and the Christian community.

Sue says that coming back to St. Mary's in 2002 felt like a homecoming because she was already so much a part of the church community. During her eight years as Assistant Curate along with all

her other duties she set up the Prayer and Spirituality Team and did a Spiritual Directors Training Course at Worth Abbey. Sue greatly treasures the friendships made during her years at St. Mary's. Following her 60th birthday one group of friends insisted she should visit Ikea as that had never been part of her life experience!

One special friendship was with Christine White who, she said, was one the wisest women she knew and felt privileged to be her mentor for a time during her ministerial training. During the vacancy in the parish between 2008/9 Sue, together with assistance from Christine and Helen Bisset, made a major contribution to the running of the parish.

After a time as Assistant Curate at St Mary's, Long Ditton, in 2012 Sue was appointed Assistant Priest at St. Mary's Ewell where she is to this day. They

have been busy years and include her gaining a 1st class Honours Degree in Religion and Theology in 2017.

In the last 15 years or so Sue has come to deeply appreciate music, Christian art, and poetry but gardening has been her lifetime passion and it featured extensively in her dissertation on the value of the Natural World and its Contribution to Human flourishing. She says “My garden is life transforming for me and takes me into a totally different world of peace and creativity and draws me into God’s presence”. Sue feels that her overarching call from God is ‘Tell my people I love them’.



From Sue’s farewell party at St Mary’s in 2010

L to R - Andrew Sillis, Sue and Christine White