

**RECTOR'S ADDRESS TO THE ST. MARY'S ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING
23RD APRIL 2006**

You will be aware that this is my tenth and last Annual General Meeting as Rector of St. Mary's. Before compiling my AGM address I always look back at the year under review and highlight significant events and developments and this year it was salutary to look back not just to the last year but to the Address I gave at my first Annual Meeting in April 1997.

There can be no doubt that much has changed in those ten years – new people, new services, new buildings, new staff: the list could go on but what has remained unchanged is, I hope, our desire to be a vibrant worshipping and serving Christian community, a worshipping and serving Christian community guided by God's Holy Spirit and it is good to be reminded that worship is at the heart of all that we do. It is our *raison d'être* from which all other activity flows, to be reminded also that worship is always a corporate activity, be it the small numbers who gather during the week either for a Eucharist or for a house group, or the many hundreds or even thousands who come to St. Mary's at major festivals. The care we take with our worship and in welcoming others to it will always reflect powerfully upon the church's standing in the community. You will know that St. Mary's is widely respected in Wimbledon even by many who do not count themselves as regular worshippers. It cannot be emphasised too greatly that all of us are "Ambassadors for Christ" and people will make judgements about the church based very largely upon what they see in us.

St. Mary's is truly blessed by the very large number of people who give of their time and skill in so many ways and I have been both privileged and greatly supported in the last ten years by some excellent churchwardens. The time and energy they have given to the task is truly amazing and St. Mary's simply could not function without them. In a similar way my ministerial colleagues have selflessly gone the extra mile. Hilary, Joan and more recently Bruce have brought so much to our worship and, of course, behind the scenes in the provision of pastoral care, counselling and a whole host of other activities, which are the bedrock of any Christian ministry. We are truly blessed, blessed also by the very large number of people who help with our Children's Ministry – the Children's Wardens, the Sunday School teachers and helpers all play a crucial part in welcoming and caring for our children and thereby sending a very powerful message to their parents. My

particular thanks must go to Giles Ellerton who has worked tirelessly with our teenagers over a long period, often single handedly, and it is a great joy to be welcoming, in a few days time, Catherine Parkes to the Staff team as the first full-time youth worker that we have employed . This is a wonderful step forward and one which I know will bring great benefits.

I mentioned worship being the bedrock of any church community. We have been richly blessed in this by the provision of music. Once again Norman and the choir have surpassed themselves, not least at one of the most memorable Carol Services, which was truly uplifting. It is a great tribute to him and to them that they have been invited to sing Choral Evensong at St. Paul's Cathedral on 5th August.

Behind the scenes in less public but no less important ways St. Mary's has benefited from a small army of people who act as cleaners, vergers, welcomers and flower arrangers. All contribute to the vitality of worship and enable our services to happen week by week.

Once again we have noticed real improvements outside and our thanks go to John Sweet and the regular volunteers. It is due to them that our churchyard this Spring is looking better than ever it has done, certainly in my memory. It was an innovation to welcome 25 students from King's College School a few weeks ago. They undertook some fairly back breaking tasks, not least creating more parking space for the Tennis Championships. I am delighted to say that their Chaplain has told me they thoroughly enjoyed their day and they very much want to come back.

Turning to the office, you will have heard Anthony mention a few minutes ago the improvements we are now undertaking. As I looked back to 1996 I noted it opened just three mornings a week and had no computer to speak of, a rather ancient word processor, I believe. It is now undoubtedly the hub of the Parish and, as you will know if you have ever visited, extremely busy every day of the week. Our thanks go to Julian for keeping such a level head under pressure and also to Jenny who has become an indispensable member of staff, whose pastoral care through the Tuesday Lunches has built up such a wonderful network. Jenny, together with Margaret Swain, has been authorised by the Bishop to take Holy Communion from the Reserved Sacrament to various nursing homes and individuals in the parish during the vacancy.

And so it is to the vacancy that I now turn. There is always speculation when an incumbent leaves as to what will happen and how long it will be before an appointment can be made. The Rectors of St. Mary's, for ancient historical reasons, are appointed not by the Bishop as is usually the case but by a special Board of Patronage. The Board will comprise the Parish Wardens – Anthony Leonard and Jonathan Turton, one elected member of the St. Mary's Church Committee, the Bishop, the Archdeacon and a representative of the Dean and Chapter of Worcester. It is not quite as unwieldy as it may sound! You will notice that the Parish and St. Mary's in particular, are well represented. The vacancy will formally begin on 5th August – the date of my installation at Wymondham Abbey but long before then the job description and the person profile will have been drawn up. The Archdeacon will be meeting with the Wardens on 18th May to begin this process and Canon Petterson from Worcester and the Archdeacon will be coming to the PCC on 12th July by which time, I am sure, most of the work will have been done. It is for the PCC to approve the job description and the profile and, if they wish, to ask for the post to be advertised. If the PCC does so, it is my view that there will be no shortage of applicants. Assuming an advertisement is placed in September or early October, shortlisting and interviews could take place before Christmas with a view to a new Team Rector being in post in the spring of 2007. This timescale, of course, assumes no hiccoughs. What I can do is to assure you that the Diocese will not in any way seek to lengthen the vacancy. They will, however, as will your Churchwardens, want to secure the very best possible candidate for the post. Wimbledon, and St. Mary's in particular, deserve nothing less.

My personal reflections on my ten years as Rector I will leave to my final service on 25th June save to record here what a privilege it has been to be part of this community and to share in so many of its joys and sorrows, triumphs and tribulations. Whatever I have been able to do or give has been returned tenfold and more. But that, I know, is the very nature of Christian ministry.

May God bless you all, and may St. Mary's continue to be that very special community that it has been for so many people for so many generations.