

# RECTOR'S ADDRESS TO THE ST MARY'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

20<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2008

Any year that starts with an uplifting service followed by a party with pink champagne has got to be good! Strictly speaking, the year started before this, at the last AGM, but my time as Rector began just a couple of week's later at the induction. Since then, so much has happened. It has been a steep learning curve for me, attempting to remember names and faces, who is responsible for what, and what 'normally' happens. All this was made easy because of the friendliness and support of the assisting clergy, wardens, committee and congregation. I quickly discovered that everything runs so smoothly and unostentatiously because of the very large number of people involved in the life of the church.

First and foremost a huge thank you to the wardens, Rosemary and Robert, whose hard work, good sense and humour have ensured that we are in good shape for the coming year. I have been amazed by the energy and commitment of my ministerial colleagues. Hilary and Bruce are both in full-time employment and yet give freely of their time and have graciously adapted to having a new Rector. They are excellent colleagues and it is a great asset to be able to offer people a variety of preaching and liturgical styles. Joan has been much missed since her illness, and I know I speak for everyone when I say that I hope she makes a full recovery and is able to return to her preaching at St Mary's soon. Catherine has developed her work with young people, building a strong Friday People and Rafters Group who seem to have enormous fun.

The day-to-day running the church is ably handled by Fiona in the Parish Office. I hope that next year her task will be made easier by the leasing of a new photocopier. Tony, as always, has turned his hand to everything from painting to plumbing to repairing noticeboards and much more. In his role as Verger he has been assisted by Vic Silvester, and thanks are due to both of them for their care in preparing for services. Worship forms the centre of church life, and our altar servers, acolytes and communion assistants enable the Eucharist to be celebrated with due dignity and reverence.

As we are still in Eastertide, the church is beautifully decorated with flowers. We are blessed with very skilled and sensitive flower arrangers. The silver is kept shiny by a dedicated team led for much of the year by Denise Murgatroyd, and now, since her 'retirement' by Tiggy Walker. They have also been responsible for the washing of altar linen (one of those invisible tasks without which services could not happen). We are also fortunate that we have a team of willing and able volunteers who clean the church every Friday.

Music has featured prominently this year. The choir has gone from strength to strength under the direction of Chris Thomas, assisted by Ben Revill and Andrew Lenon. It is excellent to have so many children already fully integrated into the choir, considering that Chris only started the first choristers within this last year. They not only sing for the services, but are also working with the RSCM Voice for Life Scheme, assisted by Iris Ronayne. The whole choir looks extremely smart in its new robes, which were generously donated by Sarah Colley – I was proud to be associated with such a choir when we

visited Southwark Cathedral. We (still) eagerly await the repair of the organ and thanks are due to Liz Hamilton for supervising this work. The invisible makers of music are the bellringers, who call us to worship week in and week out. Thank you to Lawrence Davies and all who keep up this very English tradition.

Visitors to services often comment on the joy of seeing so many children at the church. Thank you to Ellie Taylor for organising the crèche, to our children's wardens, Andrew Lenon, Michelle Sweet, and Helen Sergeant, and Jane Whittaker who took over from Helen recently, and for the large number of teachers and helpers who make this work possible. Behind the scenes, Jane Sanderson has tirelessly worked to ensure that our child protection policy is implemented.

One of the pleasures of St Mary's is its active social life and the welcome it extends to visitors. Thank you to all who act as sidesmen and welcomers and to those who prepare coffee after the services and to those who prepared meals for the Food for Thought Course. It is so important to provide refreshments and opportunities for people to meet each other.

The churchyard is looking very tidy, and in summer will be a place where people will want to linger and chat. Thank you to John Sweet and Jenny Baker and, of course, to all the helpers, including the boys from Kings and also to Angela Fox who keeps the Garden Hall Garden looking so attractive.

The heart of a church is its people. Our pastoral care is shared by many people. A particular thank you to Jenny Michalacopoulos for organising the Tuesday lunches, services at Heathland Court and Queen Alexandra Court and to Margaret Swain and all others who have assisted. I am grateful to all who pass on to me the names of those who are unwell or in distress – it is always sad when I hear that someone has been ill for weeks when because I have not known, I have not visited.

To maintain a church such as this as a centre of worship requires considerable funds. We would not be able to meet these costs without the Hall Hire and Jenny, Tracy and Camilla who organise this. Those who stand in all weathers manning the parking for Tennis Fortnight also help our funds considerably. However, this year, the biggest increase in funds came as a result of the planned giving campaign. Thank you to Roger Chadder and his team who organised this, and a big thank you to Liz Collins who keeps our accounts in good order and to those who take the collection money to the bank each week.

Publicity and communication are vital if we are to be known in the community. Thank you to Alastair Neilson who has designed our stunning website and keeps it up to date, and thank you to Una for producing Grapevine and Fiona who produces the weekly news sheets and Sharon who produces the annual calendar.

At the Discussion morning it was felt that the church needed to address its welcome, its teaching and the way in which it communicates its message. There were also concerns that the needs of some groups of people were not being addressed. During the next twelve months we will be examining these in more detail. However, some things are already happening! Bruce is starting a Men's Breakfast Group in May, and I also hope that we will be able to introduce a Sunday Breakfast after the 8:00 service on an occasional basis. The standard set so far by Rafters, who provided a superb breakfast after the Dawn service on Easter Day, is very high! The Committee and PCC have agreed to admit children to

communion prior to confirmation. The first children will be admitted this Pentecost. This will enable them to participate more fully in the Family Communion on the first Sunday of each month and brings us into line with the practice at St Mark's and St Matthew's. Although it is people that make newcomers feel welcome, the building can also help. To that end we are looking at ways of eliminating the clutter at the cross aisles and exploring the possibility of replacing the inner rather functional 1960's wood and wired glass doors with beautiful engraved glass doors. Initial discussions with the architect have determined that this is a feasible project.

We are enormously fortunate that St Mary's is such a visible reminder of the church in this area. We also benefit hugely from having an excellent church school within the Parish. In order to grow we need utilise these advantages by engaging more fully with the community, finding ways of maintaining the interest of children when there is huge competition from Sunday sports and activities, and getting to know each other better.

None of this will be possible without the help of the Holy Spirit. I ask that you pray for this church, for its wardens and Committee and for me and all who minister here, that together we may make this a place where all who come seeking may find the love of God.

Mary Bide