

RECTOR'S ADDRESS TO THE ST MARY'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
25<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2010

Another year has passed, and although when I first tried recollecting what had happened, it seemed to have been an uneventful year, the reality is that there has been a great deal happening.

For a start we have learnt to value our church building – it was indeed very alarming when rain came pouring through the roof. I also learnt (in Tennis Fortnight) that media publicity is not always very welcome!

However, what we all value most are the people. This year, there has been much sadness as we have lost a great many faithful and respected members of our congregation – Pamela Bowes, Alec Campbell, Robert Wright, Claire Lewis, Richard Wort, Kenneth Evans, David Evans, Constance Haines and Judith Duckworth. They will be greatly missed and we are all better for having known them.

But there has also been much joy: many weddings and over 100 baptisms – and of course many newcomers to the congregation. Our many “occasional offices” have highlighted the need for St Mary's to engage in mission. The church is not there as a self-serving institution; it is there for the whole community. When sorrows or difficulties darken the horizon, or when families get together to celebrate the sealing of a new relationship or the naming of a new member, it is the role of the church to provide a framework in which life can still be filled with hope and love. Our mission to all age groups is very important, not for the sake of playing a numbers game, but to help people make sense of their lives.

We have seen the 11:15 service grow rapidly this year; 15 people were confirmed, and 5 children admitted to communion.

Yet many families who bring their children to baptism never come to church again (or perhaps only at Christmas). In order to increase our contact with people on the fringes of the church we have had a series of highly successful baptism lunches, where families of children baptised recently are invited back. Thank you to Honor McDonald Watson, Camilla Peters and Davina Fernyhough who have done the catering and organisation.

We are also starting a new mid-week toddler service later this month, to build on our relationships with young children and their families. It is also part of our planning for the forthcoming year to establish a systematic approach to providing more effective care for the bereaved and those who are having a tough time with employment or other issues.

All these things are made possible by the huge number of volunteers and by my colleagues with whom I share ministry.

My thanks are due to Hilary, whose capacity for work never ceases to amaze me. You may have seen less of her in the last year, but that is because she has been covering interregna at St Johns and other churches. Bruce has now moved from St Mary's to be the priest at St John's, where he is already making his mark, but for much of this last year he shared in the ministry here. I am delighted that Martin Booth joined us last July to be curate here. It is hard to believe that he has been here for less than a year, as he has already established himself both liturgically and pastorally as a valued member of the ministry team. It is tremendous that Joan Ellis has returned to health so that we

once again have the benefit of her teaching and sermons. Catherine's work with young people goes from strength to strength, with Friday People becoming particular popular.

I am also delighted that we have two people preparing for ministry, Tracy who is now in her second year as an ordinand, and Johanna Hearn who has been accepted for training as a Reader.

Teaching about Jesus begins at a young age. We are extremely lucky to have Andrew Lenon and our children's wardens, Jane Whittaker and Giles Ellerton, indeed all of our Sunday School leaders. Thank you. I am also very grateful to all those who run the crèche during the 9:30 service under the leadership of Emma McLennan Fordyce. This enables young families to come to church without worrying about their children.

Worship continues to be enhanced by excellent music. It is wonderful to have the organ in full voice. Thank you to Chris Thomas who challenges the choir with demanding music, to the choir who rise to that challenge, to Andrew Lenon and Ben Revill who often dep for Chris, to Iris Ronayne and Neil Harvey who have helped Chris to bring on the choristers. It is particularly satisfying to see the children's choir coming to maturity, with new choristers joining the ranks and the older ones "moving up" to join the adult choir. The choristers now sing at the 11:15 communion service and this has been transformative. At that service we are extremely fortunate that we have been joined by two musicians who play once a month – Birgitta Bruening on the flute and Etienne Lambert on guitar. This gives a very different feel to the service and is much appreciated. Our organ scholar, Andrew Dickson, took up his position this year and is already able to help Chris by playing in services.

Thank you to Catherine and Shara who have organised the servers rotas and to all those who act as servers. Shara also organises the communion assistants rota – it is good now to be able to use the chalice again! Thank you to Barry Hamilton who ensures that each week we have sidesmen – and of course thank you to all our sidesmen and welcomers.

One of the strengths here is that people are not abandoned when they can no longer drive. Thank you to all who give people lifts to church, and thank you to Jenny and Margaret, and all involved in visiting the sick and housebound and those who assist in taking people communion.

If you have ever wondered how everything gets set up before the service, well it is down to the vergers. Huge thanks are due to Tony. For many years Vic has been assistant verger, working alternate weekends and verging for funerals and weddings. This year he stepped down from this role, and we thank him for all he has done. Sylvia Davies has taken over from him and rapidly learnt the mysteries of strangely named pieces of silver.

Tony spends most of his time fixing things that have broken and ensuring that everything is safe. He has laid floors, put in boilers, tested every electrical appliance and much much more. We are very lucky to have such a talented Verger/handyman.

Fiona has continued to manage the office and deal with the innumerable phone calls and we thank her for that. Thanks are also due to Jenny Michalacopoulos who sorts out the hall lettings and Camilla Brandt who deals with the regular hall bookings – which must be one of the most difficult tasks around. I also thank them and Liz Whitson, and Una Whicheloe who have manned the office in Fiona's absence.

The church grounds have benefited from all the bulbs planted last autumn, and are kept in fantastic condition by the Gardening Team, led by Amanda Bell and Jenny Baker, with John Sweet and Angela Fox amongst others. Particular thanks are due to Briony who donated the trees in the field. David McCann oversaw the levelling of the grass outside Garden Hall, and Amanda arranged the turfing, and very good it looks too. Once the roof works are finished and the grass around the church grows back, we will once again have a beautiful churchyard.

The church itself is kept clean and tidy thanks to the cleaners, under the able direction of Anita Wilson, and the silver is kept shining thanks to all the silver cleaners, directed by Vic, the linen is crisp and clean, thanks to Mary-Ann Turnbull and her team. The flowers in the church are always wonderful, and this last year we had the flower festival, where the flower arranging team, led by Ella Perring and Carolyn Ritchie, excelled themselves. That event was organised superbly by John Bush and the Social team. He and Elizabeth Broad have organised many social events this year, ranging from breakfasts, to quiz evenings, to Scottish dancing and later this year we will have the St Mary's Ball. Their energy and enthusiasm have created excellent ways in which we can get to know each other better and have fun in the process. Week by week that fellowship is also enabled by coffee after the 9:30 service. Thank you to all who help and to Shelley Dowling who co-ordinates the rota.

Another very popular, indeed over-subscribed, social event is the Harvest Lunch. Thanks are due to the All England Club for letting us use the debenture lounge, and to all our sponsors, and especially due to the team of organisers, who this year were led by Caroline Revill and Jane Sanderson. In 2010, we have a bigger lounge at the All England, so even more people can participate.

One of our regular social events is the Tuesday lunch, organised for many years by Jenny Michalopoulos and now by Sylvia Davies. Thank you to them, to all who host it and all who give lifts to it. This weekly contact means so much to those who attend.

Getting the word around about what we do is also very important. Thank you to Andrianna Maimaris for editing Grapevine and to Alastair Neilson for our excellent website and all who deliver cards at Easter and Christmas.

The trouble with mission is that it costs money, and there are always other pressing demands on funds, not least roof repairs! Thank you to Mike Leeson and all on the development appeal, to Roger Chadder who deals with regular giving, and especially to Liz Collins our Treasurer, who keeps a close eye on the figures – no mean feat in a church of this size. I am very pleased that despite the ever increasing demands on funds, we have still been able to give to charity, partly as a result of the tennis parking (where thanks are due to Peter Stevens and all our stewards) and also giving a percentage of our income each year.

We have also had collections for the earthquakes in Chile and Haiti and numerous individuals raising money for good causes.

This has been a long list of 'thank you's' and it is not finished yet. There are many more people who help who have not been named, but their contribution is no less gratefully received. Every member of the congregation contributes in one way or another, and all deserve thanks.

But lastly, and most of all, I would like to thank the committee and my wardens. We are losing three members of the committee, Mike Leeson, Jenny Baker and Andy

Evans. Thank you for all you have done. Of course, the greatest work load falls upon the wardens. Alice was I think a little nervous at becoming a church warden, but has been absolutely superb. Anyone that is prepared to deal with the awful perennial problem of parking has what it takes. And Robert has again gone the extra mile. He is always there doing what is needed, whether it is mowing the grass, managing the roof works, making sure we don't run out of wine for social events (a most important function), or keeping detailed accurate records – and all with a smile. Robert is stepping down as warden this year having served for three years. Robert, you will be much missed as warden. Thank you for all you do. Thank you Honor for sparing him for us.

I hope and pray that with the grace of God, this church may not only continue to flourish, but may be inspired to do more, to reach out into the community, and share the love of God with all.