

Parish of Fleet - All Saints with St Philip and St James
APCM 2008 - VICAR'S REPORT

Before I began to prepare this report, as I usually do, I took time to read last year's report, and the one from the year before that, and even the year before that. Weren't they miserable? Didn't they make dull and depressing reading? Wasn't I being an old 'Whinge-bag'?

Well, in some ways 'yes', and I know that some of you have commented that you were fed up with it all - and I have to admit that I have some sympathy. But each of those reports were, I think, in their own way, 'hard-hitting', and they were frank, and they were offering, I believe, an honest appraisal of the things which I thought needed to change in order to turn around some of the trends which I had discovered in the parish. I would also want to say, in defence of them, that I think that together, they have played a big part in triggering a turning point in the life of our parish, which I shall be coming around to in a minute. Each year, I have underpinned my reports with passages from scripture. In 2005 it was from John 10: "*I have come that you may have life, life in all its fullness*". In 2006 it was from 1 Corinthians 12: "*Now you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it*". And then last year there were two passages - firstly, from John 16:33: "*. . . . in the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have conquered the world*", and then from Revelation 21:6 and 7: "*To the thirsty I will give water from the spring of life, as a gift. This is the victor's heritage; (that) I will be their God and they will be my people*".

Now each of those passages in some way reflects aspects of how I was feeling at the time - particularly, there is a reflection in the first of the passages I used last year, of the fact that I was openly admitting that I had been through a wretched time of doubt and dismay! Well the good news (at least I hope you will think it's 'good'?) is that I am back 'on form', I'm 'firing on all cylinders', turbo-charged and ready for action, and there is more good news, which will follow. But first a good 'rip-roaring' scripture passage to underpin this year's report. From one of the readings which we shall use in our Eucharist this coming Sunday, the First Letter of Peter, Chapter 1, Verse 3: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*".

Which is, perhaps, a rather more eloquent way of stating what I was trying to say in my Easter Day sermon, at All Saints, which many of you heard, and which others may have read on the Parish Website - that resurrection can only be experienced after there has been a death! If Jesus hadn't died, he could not have risen, and that the signs of new birth which we are seeing in our church, are only possible because a certain death has taken place! So, 'what has died?' I hear you asking. Well, above all, there has been a 'death' of many of the destructively negative attitudes, which I, at least, was aware of during my first three years, here, and there has also been a 'death' (as I have already said) of the attitudes within me that were stopping me from having the 'living hope' that Peter spoke of, and which this parish needed, as it sought to move onward and upward!

So, enough of 'death' - what about 'life'? Well there was 'life' in all of those passages of scripture which I quoted earlier from my previous reports: in John 10: "*I have come that you may have life*". And in 1 Corinthians 12: "*Now you are the Body of Chris*". '**Life**' because the 'Body of Christ' is a **living** body, not a dead body. Then in Revelation 21: "*To the thirsty I will give water from the spring of life*". And finally in today's new passage: "*. . . .by his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope*".

Life! New life! Which brings me to the important things I want to talk about. Largely, they're all to be found in the Annual Report, so I shall not talk about any of them at length - merely steer you towards where you can delve deeper yourselves. This whole report is a celebration of parish life across the past year, and of the lay ministry which is undoubtedly one of this parish's great strengths. This 'taste' of all the good things that are happening, I have tried to categorise into the headings of our PCC Sub-Committees which do so much work:

Ministry Team -

- **Service Times** - The consultation on this revealed a large majority in favour of moving the main morning service to 10am for an experimental period of one year beginning on April 1st. Personally I believe that this small change will go a long way towards making our worship more accessible to young and old alike.
- **Pastoral Assistants** - the work of the Pastoral Assistants and their teams is crucial to the who programme of pastoral care which the parishes provides. In November we authorised Kate Wickenden

as a new PA, and we currently have three more in training (Nancy Dawson, Jennifer Kelleher and Tricia Maguire)

- **Ecumenical Links** - the Ministry Team have continued to enjoy strong links with the other denominations - I have preached at both Fleet Baptist Church and Fleet United Reformed Church this year, and in return, Revd Stephen Thornton (Fleet URC) preached a challenging sermon at All Saints. It is hoped to further explore our links in the near future.
- **Parish Risk Register** - the PCC have become increasingly aware that we face all sorts of risks, and the Parish Risk Register which covers the work of all our Committees, is a constant reminder of the need to be vigilant in the duty of care which we have to those people, and facilities for which we are responsible.

Finance And Administration -

- **Deficit** - in recent years, Finance reports have been as gloomy as the Vicar's Report! We are not yet at a stage of breaking even, and are still relying on our healthy legacy fund to cover the shortfall, but this year's accounts are more encouraging than they have been in previous - this is indeed good news!
- **Planned Giving** - after several 'campaigns' of various sorts, it is very encouraging to see that Planned Giving in this parish is now beginning to move in the direction of coming into line with other similar parishes in the diocese.
- **Budgeting** - there has been a strong emphasis on this, which has meant that there have been tight controls over expenditure, helping to reduce the deficit.

Fabric and Management

- **The new Organ at P&J** - inaugurated at Christmas time, has brought new life to the worship.
- **The All Saints Nave Area** - the removal of the old platform has been a revelation, revealing the lovely Victorian tiled floor, and livening the acoustics in the building. The current arrangement is temporary as we begin to explore a permanent new arrangement.
- **Office/Toilet Facilities** - the agreed sale of Fernhurst will move ahead once planning permission has been sought to extend the P&J hall to provide new office space and toilet facilities which link with the church. Funds raised from the sale of Fernhurst will also be used to provide improved toilet facilities at All Saints - these facilities are essential at both churches in order to be able to move forward with our plans to bring our churches alive with midweek activities.

Young People's Nurture

- **Project Reach (Resourcing Evangelism Among Children)**. It was good that this Parish was asked to pilot this scheme for the Diocese, on behalf of a wider Church of England initiative. Whilst the responses from young people raised more questions than they gave answers, and the responses from adults were disappointingly 'thin on the ground' the overall exercise has set us thinking about where we should go from here with our work amongst young people?
- **Praise and Play** - this service for under 5's and their carers has gone from strength to strength under its new leaders, Kate Wickenden and Trish Maguire.
- **All Saints School** - links with the school continue to grow - I spend a lot of time in the school, and I am very pleased to say that Alison Wyld, the new headteacher is keen to further strengthen those links, in such a way that the school and church are able to offer each other mutual support. The Seven Foundation Governors which the PCC nominates play a crucial role in the school's management.

Mission and Discipleship

- **The Parish Prayer Programme** - this was launched in September. There is no doubt in my mind that this has provided the parish and all that we do with a foundation of prayer which has been transforming. Some aspects of the programme have been more successful than others - I make particular mention of the strong effect of the Prayer Telegraph, the Prayer Diaries and the Prayer Hub.
- **The 'Growing a Healing Ministry'** weekend in November has led to a review and raising of the profile of the healing ministry in our churches. As a result of this several new people will be trained and authorised in the ministry, and there will be a series of Healing Services at P&J during the year.

- **New Way Groups** have continued to be a strong support to members as well as a prayer support to the whole work of the parish.

Communications

- **The parish Magazine** is continually under review, and plans are well established to inaugurate an Editorial Panel, and to experiment with the idea of 'home' production using the new copier.
- **The new Notice Boards** at both Churches have transformed the image which we present to the passing public.
- **New Display Boards**, which have made such a difference to the way we display information inside the buildings. (thanks for the anonymous donation of these).
- And neither of those would be much use without the means of producing good quality publications, which brings me to the new **Colour Copier**, which we purchased in the Autumn from the legacy fund.
- And then, there is the **Parish Website**, which is able to provide so much 'live' information about what we are doing, and make it accessible to anybody in the world. And I was astounded to read that it had scored this amazing 10,600 'hits' during 2007 - over 30 a day!

Social and Fundraising

- **Events** - there has been a broad programme of social events during the year, aimed at all age ranges, and catering to all tastes.
- **Funds** - a staggering £9,000 was raised for Church funds during the year.

All of this is worthy of celebration, and all of it points to the fact that the Spirit is moving through our churches and bringing that “. . . . *new birth into a living hope*”. of which Peter spoke, and which fills me with hope and enthusiasm for the future life of the parish. This has been a year of change in all sorts of ways, and as I progress through my report, I want to bring you up to date with the three appointments which we are in the process of making.

- **Administrator Appointment** - Ros Parkes will be retiring at the end of April after over 20 years in post. It is hard to imagine life in the parish without the enormous influence she has over parish life, and in keeping a whole succession of clergy on the 'straight and narrow'. Two large areas of her former responsibilities are to be taken out of the new post, and placed in 'volunteer' hands - the new PCC Secretary will be Cath West who has been worshipping at P&J for the past three year - herself a 'clergy daughter' she has a long experience of parish life, and we look forward to seeing her 'grow' into her new role. Meanwhile, all responsibility for Hall Bookings and Billing has already been taken over by Lynda Hix. As a result of this, the hours have been reduced to 25 a week, and the post was advertised earlier this month. We were disappointed with the response to the advert, and have accordingly decided not to call any of the applicants to interview. However, by chance, Neil Vigers, who was for many years Vicar of Hook, but is currently taking some time out of Parish Ministry, is temporarily living in the parish (in our Curate's House at 38 Oast House Drive, in fact) and I am very happy to tell you that we have, just this week, appointed Neil to the Administrators Post on a 6 month contract, during which time he will also help us to carry out an audit of our whole administrative procedure, and help us to make a substantive appointment to the post later in the year.
- **Priest Appointment** - as soon as we became aware that Ros Roberts would be moving on to an incumbency post, we began to think about how we should best replace her? After much discussion within the PCC, with the Archdeacon of Surrey, and with the leadership of the Church on the Heath, it has been decided to advertise for a Priest as follows: 'Wanted - A Priest Colleague, to take local responsibility for the Daughter Church, and to work alongside the Vicar during a period when the Churches in the area explore various models of Collaborative Ministry'. I can best explain the rationale of this if I read to you the introduction which I have written to the Parish Profile and Job Specification which will be sent out to prospective candidates: *“The enquirer may well want to ask why it is that we are making this appointment, and at this time? Traditionally the parish has been staffed by the Incumbent and a Senior Curate. The Revd. Ros Roberts has been Senior Curate since 2004, but has now left to run a rural benefice in the Oxford Diocese. In making a new appointment, I, fully supported by the PCC and the diocese, are seeking to move towards a new way of ministering in the parish. Foremost, we are seeking a priest who is experienced enough, and confident enough, to take local*

responsibility for the day to day running of the Daughter Church of St Philip & St. James, and the associated pastoral work, whilst still working alongside me in ministering across the wider town and parish. Since my arrival here 4 years ago, I have increasingly felt that P&J (that's what everybody calls it in Fleet) has been like a teenager who has not had the opportunity to cut the apron strings, and forge out into the world alone! It is a vibrant young Church, where the work of the Holy Spirit has been very evident, and I believe that the proposed arrangement will have the advantage of allowing it to move forward and gain some independence and, with the new priest, have the freedom to develop its own style of worship, whilst allowing me some more time to devote to the needs of the Parish Church and its congregation. There is, however, no intention of severing any of the strong links that have been built up across the years, and which have provided much of the strength which is very evident. At the same time, working with the Archdeacon, I am encouraging the Church on the Heath, and the neighbouring Parish of Christ Church, Crookham (with whom we are already in a Group Ministry) to enter into conversation with us about a variety of different forms of collaborative ministry. One possible outcome of this is that a Team Ministry may be created, though we are entering into the conversation fully aware that Crookham Parish are not in favour of joining such a team, whilst Church on the Heath are guardedly enthusiastic. Were this to be the eventual outcome, then this post would become a 'fully-fledged' Team Vicar's post. Initially, the person appointed will have the legal status of Senior Curate, though they will be locally known as the Priest Responsible for St. Philip & James. They will be housed at first in the current Curate's House on Ancells Farm (the house is large enough to qualify as a Parsonage) though the aspiration will be to move the priest to a location nearer to P&J as soon as possible. It is quite hard to predict how long this will take, though my personal hope, is that it would be able to be completed within an approximate two year timescale. I am excited by these plans, and look forward to working alongside a person who can share my enthusiasm and vision for ministry in the town. I believe that the post would be ideally suited to someone who has completed a title post, and now seeks responsibility, without being hampered by the administrative drawbacks of an incumbency." The post will be advertised in Church Times on the 18th and 25th April, with a view to interviews taking place on the 21st and 22nd May.

- **Parish Outreach and Young People's Worker** - when we advertised this post last year, we were very disappointed not to get any applicants. The PCC has recently renewed its resolve to review the Job Specification and Person Profile, with a view to re-advertising in the near future. This appointment, when made, will largely be funded by the legacy account, which we think will be a worthwhile and appropriate use of money which was left to us to further our work of mission in the town. I very much hope to soon be reporting progress on this front.

I'm going to end my report with the traditional 'thank yous' - to Kate, Beth and Martha, my wife and daughters, whose constant support, encouragement and critique are a constant support and inspiration. To Claire and Elizabeth, my Churchwardens this year, who have given so much of their time and energy in supporting the leadership and management of the parish, and to Camilla, Tricia, Jeremy and Paul, their deputies. To Ros Parkes, as Administrator and Vicar's Secretary, for all that she continues to be. To the Ministry Team: Pauline, Ron, Mary, and John, whose workload has greatly increased since Ros's departure, and to the Pastoral Assistants and their teams, our PCC, Junior Church Leaders, Youth Leaders, Creche supervisors, Social Committee, musicians, intercessors, readers, servers, sacristans, cleaners, flower arrangers and coffee providers. In addition to these, there are a four people who I want to especially mention by name, who have carried out exceptional work, way beyond the call of duty:

- Richard Buller, who has not only been Chair of Finance, but has also chaired the Communications Committee and taken responsibility for the Risk Register.
- Juliet Worthington, our highly competent and hard-working Treasurer.
- Robert Smith who has skilfully and diligently created and maintained the Parish Prayer Programme.
- Graham Hix, for his long hours of overseeing the notice board project and providing and maintaining up-to-date advertising material.

And, as usual, 'thank you' to anyone I have inadvertently missed out!

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

Roy Woodhams - 27th March 2008