

Parish of Fleet - All Saints with St Philip and St James
APCM 2011 - VICAR'S REPORT

This has been an extremely busy, but highly significant year in the life of our parish. I'm going to talk about three things today, which have been the things which have largely formed the 'backbone' of this busy and significant time, and will, I am sure, provide the foundation for what lies ahead. The three things are Buildings, Money and Human Resources.

Buildings: When we met for last year's APCM we still weren't sure when our various capital projects were going to become realities – that was largely because we hadn't yet got all the funding or permissions in place. Gradually during the rest of 2010, however, things all fell into place. A magnificent fund-raising effort by the social committee meant that we were able to complete the new lighting scheme in All Saints Church in time for Christmas, and I know that everybody agrees that this has transformed the interior of the Church and made it a first-rate venue for worship as well as for the concerts and other secular events that take place in the building. In May, Fernhurst was sold, meaning that all the funding was in place for the major building projects at both ends – the Fleet Parish Community Centre, and the improved meeting, kitchen, toilet and disabled facilities at P&J. Getting the final planning consent and faculty permission for the FPCC was a labourious and frustrating process, which took far longer than we ever expected. This meant that the start date for the project slipped several months to September and the final completion to January. Now that the Centre is fully operational, I am sure that you will all agree that it has all been well worth the wait – the new facilities are fantastic and meet our needs in every respect. The Coffee Bar is proving to be hugely successful, and I am enormously grateful to Elizabeth Waller and the team of volunteers who are making it such. There was a brief step backwards with the P&J project when we discovered that the present heating system had crumbled and was in urgent need of replacement. However, some frenetic work by Andreas and Nick and the team means that we have secured favourable contracts for this work, as well as for the planned improvements and the installation of the new Audio-visual equipment which will together make this building a first-class facility for worship and meetings as well as for hire purposes. Work is due to begin here on Monday, and once completed, all of our facilities will be in fine shape for us to move forward as a church and to realise our vision of creating 7-day Church Buildings and reaching out to the local community with Christ's love. Buildings are wonderful things to have, but in themselves they are useless commodities! A house only becomes a home when the residents move in and create a safe, happy environment in which to nurture each other as a family. And this is the challenge which we now face as a church – to use the buildings to nurture our family and build our community, which is why the other two things I am going to talk about today are Money, and Human Resources!

Money: You have already heard Juliet, Richard and Nick talking about our financial situation, and you are probably thinking that you have heard the same sort of story, year on year, at the Annual Parish Church Meeting. But there are two particular things that make 'the story' different this year, and they are both, in their own way, good things to hear. The first thing, is that as a result of the 'Funding our Future' campaign, which we launched at last year's APCM, and as a result of the fantastic work that has been done by the Funding our Future Team, under Nick Doran's Chairmanship, as a Parish, we have really begun to address our financial situation this year, and in a way that we have not done for many years – certainly not in the 7 years that I have been here, and almost certainly not for some time before that! Many of you have heard the message this year, understood the situation, and responded in generosity. As Nick said, there are challenges ahead as we seek to reach the hearts and bank accounts of those of you who have not yet felt able to respond, but I nevertheless feel a real sense of optimism that our goals are achievable and that for this parish The Lord (working through you) will provide! The second thing that is different and good this year is that we no longer have financial assets to fall back on. 'How can this be good?' I hear you asking! Well, it is good because it means that we have actually spent our legacy money on the sorts of things that those who left it would have wanted us to spend it on – namely, in making our buildings fit for purpose in the 21st century, rather than in propping up an unsustainable annual deficit. So that is good, and it is also good that we now have a clear picture of the actual income we need as a Parish in order to continue to survive year by year and to grow as a church, a people and a family. Now all of this comes under the heading of 'Christian Stewardship' but Christian Stewardship has traditionally had two parts to it – firstly Money, and secondly Time and Talents – that is, the whole way that we live our lives in relation to God and each other and the Christian family, the Church. Which brings me to the last thing I want to talk about:

Human Resources: All that we have achieved so far, and are achieving at the moment, has only been made possible because of the time commitment and dedication of those who have worked so hard. We have a rich variety of gifts and talents within this Parish, but I do think we have some way to go in order to be fully the sort of Church that God wants us to be in terms of the sort of commitment and cohesion that we present within that family. Let me read from St Paul's Second Letter to the Church in Corinth: *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."* Here we have rich picture of what a Church could and should be like – a place where we all do different things, but where those things complement each other perfectly, so that there are no stronger areas and no weaker area, just one 'well oiled' machine in which every component has a part to play. And above all, that this Church really is 'The Body of Christ'. That is the sort of Church which I long see in Fleet, but I think you will all agree that we still have some way to go in order to fully be that Church. As our buildings are completed, and as our financial situation improves, I believe that this must now be our priority for the years to come – to strive to build up the Body of Christ and to be the Spirit-filled community that God wants us to be. But it is not just a task for the Ministry Team, or for the PCC or for the Pastoral Assistants – it is for each and every one of us as we gather into one place all of the gifts, talents and resources that we have to share.

I'm going to end my report with the traditional 'thank you's':

- To the ministry Team - Andreas, Jennifer, Pauline, Ron, Mary and John, for all the support that they give to me, and for the inspiring leadership they provide for all our worship.
- To our exceptionally proficient and dedicated Churchwardens this year, Andrew and Nick, and their Assistants, Dian, Tricia, Mike and Paul
- To our ever-cheerful Administrator, Charlotte Betts, now into her third year since joining us in March 2009.
- To our PCC, especially mentioning Cath West, our Hon PCC Secretary this year, and Judith Astles, who stepped into that role for the first part of the year while Cath was on maternity leave.
- Also on the administrative side, to our Finance Committee, chaired by Richard Buller, with Juliet Worthington as Treasurer, and to Lynda Hix for managing the halls.
- To the Pastoral Assistants and their teams for the hours which they give supporting the Ministry Team and engaging with those who come to us seeking pastoral care.
- To the Junior Church Leaders, Youth Leaders, Creche supervisors, and leaders of Praise and Play.
- To our Electoral Roll Officer, Pamela Pimm
- To our Social Committee, who have again done an incredible job of fundraising and providing a programme of social activities for all ages.
- To our musicians, intercessors, readers, servers, sacristans, cleaners, flower arrangers, gardening teams and coffee providers.
- And, as usual, 'thank you' to anyone I have inadvertently missed out!

Roy Woodhams – 7th April 2011