



The Parochial Church Council of Horne, St Mary the Virgin

Rector's Report 2023

I know that my annual report should be looking back over the year 2022 but I can't help be aware of more recent events, thinking particularly of my announcement on Palm Sunday about my retirement in January 2024, and that therefore this report, the last rector's/vicar's report I will ever write, needs, I think, to have a slightly different focus – both looking ahead and looking back

I said in my report last year that our increased sense of being part of a benefice is not only a good thing, it is an essential thing – the individual churches can only continue as part of the benefice. When I came here in 2014 the benefice didn't exist but now it more than exists, to me it feels like a living thriving entity, with a real sense of identity and one that my successor, when appointed, can build on.

That identity comes about through individuals in the three churches getting to know each other better. Our joint services help with this process, as does the joint choir practice and the Lent Course. In our 2022 Lent Course we followed the Church of England's Pilgrim Course looking at Holy Communion and this year we have followed a course written by me, focusing on a deeper exploration and understanding of what Christians believe. I have been heartened by the number of people who have attended this year and also how well the groups have worked in the chapel in Smallfield Church Hall, where we first met last year. I feel that all the Lent Courses, but particularly this year's one, where two quite large groups of people from across the three churches have met on a Monday or Wednesday, have shared thoughts and feelings together, explored faith together and got to know each other better is an important part of being church. Church life is not just about people *going* to church, it is also about people *being* church, being the body of Christ in this particular place and living out our mission to make his life and love known through our words and actions.

And as this new chapter of benefice life approaches, our vision for being church and how that expresses itself in our mission, is something we need to be specifically thinking about. The first step towards getting the benefice ready for my successor will be putting together a new Mission Action Plan (MAP), a key document required to be in place by the diocese as part of the succession process, and before long I shall be sending out a questionnaire to all of you as the first stage of creating the new MAP. It will help us all to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses as a benefice, as well as our opportunities and the things we might struggle with, and the replies will feed into a morning together on Saturday 1st July in Smallfield Church Hall at which the MAP will begin to take shape. The morning is not just for PCC members but is open to all. I hope as many of you as possible are able to come along and play your part in shaping the future of the benefice.

Part of being church is engaging with the community around us. Our special open-air service for the Queen's Jubilee and participation in the community celebrations, along with the special Choral Evensong on the eve of her funeral were examples of this engagement. So too were our Christmas services, so well supported across all three churches in different ways by people who don't usually come to church – and I never think "It's a pity we don't see you at other times" I only ever think "It's lovely we see you at Christmas". Café Church, launched on Good Friday 2022 is another way, as are, to name some but not all, the Community Lunch, CAMEO, HearHere and the WOW, the Wednesday coffee morning hosted by the church and run by the Smallfield Surgery Health Champions. My regular assemblies at Burstow School are another way again.

As I look back over 2022 I'm very grateful for all the support, companionship and friendship that my clergy colleagues, Charles and Tony, gave me last year and it has been wonderful that just as we said goodbye to Tony at the beginning of this year, Steve appeared on the scene and has already fitted in so well with Charles and me and with the wider benefice community. Also, a big thank you to my churchwardens over the last year, Kay, Ann, Sue, Andrew, Nick and Rosie who have done so much to support the life of the church. A big thank you to Ginette and Peter for the way they have supported and developed the music across the three churches, and to Roger, Stella and Emma for their commitment and contribution to our worship over the last year. It's lovely that following Stella's retirement, James Wells is now playing at Outwood.

I'd like to thank Judith for all the work she has done to support me and the benefice in all sorts of ways and as we look to the future, thought will need to be given as to how all that she does can be done by others. For the

past six years Judith has been the editor of The Smallfield and Burstow News, which has recently become the Smallfield, Burstow and Horne News, and the magazine is another example of not only community engagement but also community building, in that its contents bring together so much news from local organisations and events. It would be wonderful if a new editor could be found; it is an enjoyable task for someone with the necessary IT skills and interest in the local community. Judith has also, in effect, worked as a benefice administrator, and as we look to the future, we all need to think of how this can be handed over to others so that the benefice runs smoothly not just in the interregnum but also when my successor is appointed. In many ways the benefice has had two for the price of one with Judith and me and there mustn't be any expectation that it will happen like that again – it was just how it happened with Judith and me.

And speaking of Judith and me, I'd like to end this, my last Annual report, in the same way that I ended my retirement announcement on Palm Sunday:

"I don't want to turn this into a goodbye speech because that's nine months away – and anyway all goodbyes are in a sense 'hasta la vista,' 'au revoir', and 'until we meet again'. But I do just want to say *now*, that when the time does come, I will be ending my 35 years of stipendiary ministry in a place in which, and with people among whom, I have felt so blessed and lucky to be, and where Judith and I have been so happy and felt so at home."

With love to you all

Nicholas