

The Rector's verbal report to the APCM 2016-2017

My thanks to you all for the warm welcome I have received since arriving in Worplesdon. I must also thank my clergy colleagues: it's never easy to integrate someone new into an existing team, but each of them in their own unique way is an absolute blessing to me (and to you!); I am so grateful.

I must also mention Michaela – she is, after all, my next-door neighbour (well, three days a week!) and she, too, has had to adjust to this newcomer. Michaela is one of the most even-tempered people I have ever met, and so hard-working, so thank you Michaela.

I want to say something about Nigel, too - you are a joy to work with, and our music here (thanks due also to John Payne, our choir, and all our musicians and singers).... our music here is wonderful.

Then there are our churchwardens. They do so much, often quietly and behind the scenes, that it's easy to forget just HOW much they do! So Glenda and Susie, thank you.

When I arrived in Worplesdon I was very alarmed to discover that we did not have a treasurer! But then I was told that we had a 'sort of' treasurer, so I felt a bit better about it! Now, though, I'm delighted to say, we have a proper honorary treasurer, as John McLean graciously gave in to my constant requests to him to move from 'sort of' to 'proper' and allowed the PCC to appoint him. The role of treasurer is vital to our parish, and is very wide-ranging, as you will see as our meeting progresses. So John, thank you for all that you do.

Huge thanks to Jenny, our parish safeguarding officer, who was just beginning to get to grips with it all when the diocese threw out the regulations and brought in new ones! But more of that at the PCC meeting that follows this one.

Thanking people is always a very risky thing to do, as in an organisation of this size it is inevitable that one or two people, fully deserving of thanks, get unintentionally overlooked. And where does one stop? But I'm not averse to risk-taking, so thank you to our virgers, our stewards, our vision group chairs and members, our flower ladies, to Dan and to Jenny for the marriage preparation days, our servers, our lay assistants, to Dan and to Dominic as they care for our churches, those who enable our many and various groups to happen, those who look after our buildings and our churchyard, to those who work alongside John in accounts, those who cut the grass and make coffee and wash-up and ring bells and complete our wedding and baptism administration, to our website, social media and magazine team, to our PCC members and PCC secretaries (currently plural!) ... and... and.... To all of you, in all the things you do, thank you. And if you can think of someone I haven't thanked, take matters into your own hands. There's nothing magical about thanks from **me** so, if anyone's been left out, please do thank them yourself, on behalf of all of us.

Over the past few decades, churches have become more and more aware of the requirement to move on from serving mainly the needs of their church members - we must now reach out to our local communities in various and effective ways, and not just to ensure the survival of **our** churches; the continuance of the Christian faith in this country is also in our hands.

Today's public has high standards; whether visiting a theatre, a golf club, a restaurant or a church, expectations regarding kitchen and toilet facilities are high, and we all know that both our churches need attention in these areas. Indeed, many of these public expectations are enshrined in law, particularly where health and safety and accessibility are concerned.

The transformation vision group and the standing committee to the PCC, having taken preliminary advice from a surveyor, an architect, and the secretary to the Diocesan Advisory Committee, will soon begin the process of making great improvements to the kitchen and toilet facilities at St Alban's and at St Mary's. Subject to the usual permissions, the toilets and kitchens in both buildings will be re-planned, re-fitted and re-decorated. The toilet facilities at St Alban's will be given more space by moving an internal wall and by creating a doorway into the narthex. There will be excellent facilities for those with a disability. At St Mary's more space will be created for both the kitchen facility and the toilets, and levelling of the floor will ensure wheelchair accessibility.

Also high on the list of priorities is the redecoration of St Alban's throughout the building, and the proper repair of the forecourt, and the St Mary's driveway, to include marking out defined parking spaces.

Now, we are keen to move on these improvements as soon as possible, but we will require faculty permissions that, where a listed building is concerned, are not always forthcoming as quickly as we would like. Yesterday I had a meeting with the DAC secretary, who was very encouraging of our plans and understands that we need to move quickly. The work at St Alban's can take place only in August, so that we do not disrupt those who hire our hall during the rest of the year. By June 1st we have to get architects' drawings to the DAC, in order for them to consider the granting of a faculty. So, over the next two weeks we will be very busy, putting together a project management team for the building works, and getting initial quotes from a number of architects, which the PCC will then consider. Work at St Mary's is just as important, however the age and status of the building mean that wider permissions will be required and consultations undertaken – while these are already underway it will take a little longer for the work to begin.

Many other exciting possibilities for the future are under consideration; these will be further discussed in the months to come and, where they appear workable, we will conduct needs analyses and church and community consultation. Be assured that as the officers and PCC of St Mary's and St Alban's we are very aware of our responsibilities as stewards of God's people and buildings, and of your generosity, so we will continue to prayerfully and responsibly work together to discern God's vision for this place.

Some of you have expressed concern that the changes made to the pattern of services, near the beginning of the interregnum, have resulted in families and children choosing to worship solely at St Alban's. And some of you will have heard me say that part of the reason behind their choice is the lack of appropriate facilities at St Mary's. The building works I've outlined are just the beginning of equalising the balance, between our two churches, of the style of worship and activities we can offer – even the very recent change to our services will be reviewed after one year, so all possibilities remain open. But I want you, please, to think about something. If a dearly loved member of your family who had previously lived close by, had to move elsewhere for practical reasons, would you stop visiting them? Would you consider them to no longer be part of your family? No, of course not! The families and children have not 'gone' from us – they are seven minutes down the road! Those of you who heard my sermon on Easter Day may remember the oft-repeated phrase, 'Love one another'. If we call ourselves Christians, we don't have the option to just read about loving one another, or to just speak the phrase as empty words – we have to demonstrate it. If we love one another, and pray for each other, we will choose to spend time together wherever that, for the moment, needs to happen. Love is bigger than any building. Our buildings are very different, but they are both buildings in which our church (for our church is the people, wherever they happen to be at any particular time)... in which our church gathers. There should be no competition between them: they may be different, but they are equal. Just as

a parent loves all their children, we must surely love both our buildings, and all the people who worship in them.

The diocesan initiative, Transforming Church, Transforming Lives, will be launched in our parish on Sunday 18th June, when Bishop Andrew joins us for the united service to celebrate the 50th anniversary of St Alban's Church. While the work to our buildings forms part of the transformation agenda in Worplesdon, underpinning it and everything else that we do, as Bishop Andrew will explain, is discipleship – that is, drawing more people into the family of God.

We've heard from John (and again, thank you so much for all that you do for us)... we've heard about the seriousness of our financial situation. We've also heard some of the reasons for that situation. Now, we can control only a few of the causative factors. We can't, sadly, enable our church members to live for ever. We can't, of course, prevent people from sometimes moving away. There are, though, two elements that **are** in our control: the amount that **we** give, in both our time and our money, and the effort we make in drawing others into our church family. When was the last time you invited a friend or family member to come to church with you? All of us have networks outside the church – various clubs and groups we belong to, or people with whom we regularly socialise. If every one of us committed to bringing one new person into the church family in the coming year, think of the difference it would make!

A number of us, during Lent, studied a course that was all about sharing our faith in our day-to-day encounters, and one of the comments to come out of the study groups was the need to have more confidence in talking to others about Christianity. So, if you hesitate about inviting someone to join us on a Sunday, look out for the dates of our next course, because confidence in our faith will be its focus. And there is help available to us in the diocese, with discipleship and parish development experts more than happy to come to hold workshops for us.

Of course, for any of this to work, you have to want to do it! So, if you think about inviting someone to church, but are put off because you worry that they would not enjoy or appreciate the experience, talk to your clergy team. If you think that the services we offer are not appealing enough to invite a friend to, we need to know!

We know what we need to do to ensure the continuance of the church in Worplesdon parish. But we also need to be mindful of the wider threat to the Church of England in our country. And it's not the threat that the media would have us believe, of Islamisation, or political correctness, or the power of science – no – what threatens Christianity in this country is a mixture of apathy, and the public's belief that the Church is a backward-thinking, discriminatory organisation.

The cure for apathy, for people not caring about the Church, is to show them how much the Church cares about them. And the antidote to the belief that we discriminate against difference is to show them that, not only do we love God and love one another – we love them too. So **many** people these days feel that they are fighting their battles alone – the battle of loneliness, of mental ill-health, of marriage breakdown, of addiction, of the endless day-to-day weariness brought on by the ridiculous demands of their working lives and the effort of keeping everything financially afloat. Love one another. Pray for each other. Here.... at St Mary's.... at work.... at home.... in Guildford.... at the supermarket: in every waking moment, love one another, pray for each other.

Some people have asked me, over the last few months, "If you had known what you know now, about our parish, when you came for interview, and if you had known the size of the challenge, would you still have said yes?" That is SO easy to answer! Yes, yes, and yes! I love being here. I relish the challenge. And I'm in this for the long haul, so I hope you are too! Thank you.