

Rector's Report 2023

It's always a challenge to try to sum up how I have seen the last year when I come to speak to you, and it seems especially hard this time. If there's a way of summarising the twelve months leading up to this meeting, it might be best to describe them as *uneven*! We've advanced in some ways and in others have come up against obstacles that still need to be dealt with.

It's fair to say that numbers attending public worship have more or less stabilized and we average between 50 and 65 souls at the main service on a Sunday. In the major feast seasons of Easter and Christmas some services are up and some down: Holy Week services this year were better attended than at any time since I arrived here, but attendance at the main service on Easter Day was down a bit on 2022's figure. It's a relief to see that after some months of low attendance Messy Church is growing again and we are developing what seems like a new group of regulars, with considerable overlap with the Toddler Group. Toddler Group itself is extremely successful, so much so that sometimes we have to close the door as our facilities are full.

We've also had a successful year financially, managing to end 2022 with a modest surplus rather than the deficit we experienced in 2021. Much of this is due to charging something closer to a market rent for our property of 26 Tudor Road, which for years was let at a nominal figure as the major element in our support for the Trinity Trust Team. We are not sure what the long-term future of the property is but we will certainly hang on to it for at least another year as a new lease has been signed with the tenants. The revamped Spring Fair, held in and around the church, proved very popular and successful and was much appreciated by the village.

New ventures have included the Contemplative Prayer Group (although that may be rested for a little while) and Gertrud Sollars's fortnightly Bible Study group. We also managed to run three seasonal gatherings of Forest Church having talked about it for months before finally getting going, taking public worship out into the community, and the natural world.

However, there are aspects of our Church life which are becoming tougher to manage. We've found it impossible to find an organist to cover all the Sunday services we would like, and John Preston has kindly played the piano to accompany hymns when we can't. I will also be rethinking the Midnight Mass as it's clear we don't have the musical or personnel resources to produce the kind of experience I would prefer. The various services I introduced to try to develop new 'audiences' – Compline online, Forest Church, and Sunday Space – have not yet done so, however much they might be appreciated by those who do take part. The next Sunday Space is being planned by a team co-ordinated by Gertrud so this will add a new and hopefully fruitful element which I can't do on my own. Ray relinquished the role of Verger, and we found it hard to progress some projects and ideas. The gents' toilet repairs looked at first like something we might be able to handle in-house, but has now escalated to an involved project which is taking far longer than expected. Sue Petty meticulously planned the after-school meals project, gathered a team of helpers from far beyond the church, collected funding and consulted widely, but it remains to be seen whether it can work – much to the surprise of everyone concerned. Over the course of the year, we said goodbye to Keith Powell, Yvonne Budd, Betty Sargent, Edouard le Maistre, Judith Smith, and Heather Bryn Thomas.

I have had one meeting so far in respect of the Parish Needs Process which aims at helping parish churches develop their Mission Action Plans ready for the Archdeacon's Visitation in June. I haven't yet worked out quite how to go about this but will let you know more soon!

As always it's a bit invidious to pick out individuals for thanks but equally as always I owe great thanks to Helen and Geoff as churchwardens taking on a huge range of tasks which would otherwise be very distracting – and we give our special thanks to Helen at the end of her six years as churchwarden. Graeme and Jane have as ever organised servers and services indefatigably, and Jane has resurrected the brass- and silver-cleaning rota which is a great help. Alan Smith stepped back from his role as our Foundation Governor at the Infants School after the sad death of Judith, but his enthusiasm and commitment in that role was hugely appreciated at the school. And never forgetting that thanks are due to each and every member of this community of souls, for your support, your prayers, your commitment, and your love of one another expressed in all those other ways. May the Lord bless you in all you seek to do in his name, as we carry on the adventure – with all its ups and downs – of being his people in this time and in this place.