

# The Vicar's Annual Report 2022

Each year in the pattern of readings that we follow Sunday, by Sunday, we encounter extracts from John's Gospel. In this more thematic rather than chronological account of Jesus' life the reader is taken on a journey beginning with the famous prologue ("In the beginning was the Word..." - which is read at every First Communion of Christmas in the Benefice Christmas) and concluding with the resurrection accounts. At the end of Chapter 20, there is a recognition that there is not enough space for John to include all that Jesus did, but those things which are written are chosen so that the reader may "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through faith you may have life in his name" In the last twelve months as our pattern of services and other activities have resumed in full and without restrictions that life has become more visible once again. There is much to be thankful for, highlights in the Benefice have included seeing all our church buildings filling up to celebrate Christmas in a variety of services, welcoming children back into St Mary's Theydon Bois to launch the Arts Society Church Trails (a project since expanded to include the other churches of the Benefice), hosting a Deanery Confirmation service, and seeing familiar faces from the farming community at our Harvest service and Pet service at St Mary's Stapleford Tawney.

Every year, I write of my thankfulness to the team of people who do so much to resource our worship, and the organizational tasks that take place behind the scenes. The church is described as the body of Christ, and as I see all that takes place, I am amazed by the wisdom, skill, time and talents contributed by so many. My sincere thanks to you all. Our team of Churchwardens carry a particular set of responsibilities and the team made up of Mary Gill, Margaret Dennis, Jo Shephard, John Chaplin, Liz Hannibal and Hilary Mosely have continued to exercise their leadership in a wise and Godly way. It is fair to say, it would have been a far harder task to minister without their counsel and friendship. Liz Hannibal has decided that for the second time, it is the right moment to pass the baton onto someone else. Liz volunteered to return as Warden two years ago, and I am grateful to her for her willingness to use her time in this way. Rev Carol Newnham has continued to serve alongside me, and it has been good to serve alongside and pray with her this year. Sarah Bowen continues as our Benefice Administrator to keep us in good order, and in particular she has been a welcoming first point of contact for those seeking ministry from the parishes in times of joy and sorrow. The Benefice continues to be committed to doing all we can to be a safe space for all, and with the work of Andrea Crombie and John Chaplin as Parish Safeguarding Officers we have continued to follow the House of Bishops' guidance on Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable adults, including following safer recruitment practices. All members of the parochial church councils who wished to continue serving beyond their current term of office have been asked to complete basic and foundation Safeguarding training (online or in person) and complete a Domestic Violence Awareness training module.

There is a small army who do a huge range of things which keep St Mary's community alive, and it continues to amaze me the amount that we are able to do together. Sarah Bowen continues to be employed as our Benefice Administrator, and I am grateful to have her on our team, ensuring that all is in place for the Occasional Offices. Our churchwardens, (Mary Gill and Liz Hannibal), and the whole PCC have been a great source of counsel this year, and I am grateful to God for them all. In 2021, Michael Palmer decided not to seek re-election as Churchwarden, and I would like to record my thanks to him for the many hours he gave in service of Christ in the role. Thank you to Alan Higgins and Liz Douglass who have led our fortnightly homegroup and to Sarah Twitchett, from the Red Balloon Foundation who has led the children's groups alongside Maisy Lee and a team of volunteers from the church. The children's section of the choir has grown, both in number and skill – thank you to Hugh Meteyard for giving up his time each Monday to teach them. Thank you to our organists, to all the sidespeople, readers and leaders of prayers, and simply to everyone who contributes to the shared life of the church at Theydon Bois. Our churchyard is maintained by a faithful team of volunteers each Thursday (led by John Eaton), and we continued to be blessed in our worship through the skills of the flower arrangers led by Joanne Miles-McKelvey -we are indebted to them all. We continue to follow the House of Bishops' guidance on Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, and Andrea Crombie oversees this vital work as Parish Safeguarding Officer. The Theydon Parishes are fortunate to have two members of the clergy team, and I am indebted to Rev Carol Newnham for all she has given in ministry. All too often clergy minister in isolation, and I have valued all that Carol has done both

publicly and behind the scenes. For example, it is thanks to her that our social media profile has grown, and reflections have been offered on Facebook to aid our prayers. In 2021, we have continued to benefit from the ministry of Tony Dawson, and Timothy Adams as Authorized Local Preachers. Beryl Denney laid down her Permission to Officiate as a Reader, and I would like to express my gratitude to her for her years of ministry among us. Looking to the future, in 2021 John Philip was selected to train for Licensed Lay Ministry and the PCC supported Liz Douglass' application to serve as an Authorized Local Preacher and I look forward to seeing how God leads and uses them. There are many others who give a significant amount of time but finally, I wish to record my thanks to Andrew Tunks and to Carol Fention for the many things they both do behind the scenes to ensure our finances are kept in good order. This year Greville Norman stands down as our Independent Examiner and I thank him for his service to use and wish him well for the future.

So into 2022, where are we going? The war in Ukraine has changed to world around us. Many people in our parish and Benefice face significant challenges in the months ahead, so how should the church respond? Two years ago, leaders of the Benefice discerned under God our core values to be **faith, love and community**. These are as relevant today as they ever were. The Psalmist writes "The LORD is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear?" and "One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple (Psalm 27.1 & 4). I believe there is no other guide through life than Christ, who gave of Himself and promised the kingdom through the Spirit, but that doesn't mean that the answers to all our lives questions are immediately obvious. Both testaments, Old and New are filled with people wrestling together with what faith means and how to live it out. That is where our second and third of our values come together. Whatever 2022 or even future years bring, it is together with one another and with Jesus that hope is found. God has called us together in this place to be disciples in the Theydon Parishes, to learn of Jesus, to proclaim the faith in word and deed and through our gathering weekly and at festival times to bring the world before the risen Jesus in prayer. The crib, the cross and the experience of the desert are all part of the Christian experience alongside peace deeper than words. Martin Luther wrote of the importance of spending time in prayer and giving more time to prayer when things got busy. This is the real work of the church, taking us deeper into God.

So, where are we going? My prayer is that in 2022 and beyond our business would be deepening Christian faith, building community and loving one another and the wider world in response to the greatest love of all, that of Jesus Himself, through regular worship, private and public prayer and walking alongside the parish community in the times of great challenge and great joy.