

VICAR's REPORT

2021 continued to prove to be a challenging year of managing change – rather like the Hokey Cokey we had one foot in and one foot out of our churches at various times of the year depending on what the situation was with regard to Lock Down restrictions! Throughout this constant change and challenge I have been deeply impressed and encouraged by the leadership and good humour of Richard - supported of course by Pat, Andy, and others – together they have upheld sensible precautions while still allowing the life of the church to creatively flourish. I am deeply thankful to each of them, and all of you, who have continued, despite all the various challenges, to play your part in the life of your church.

2021 also marked change in the diocese with our diocesan bishop standing aside and changes in the deanery with me becoming Area Dean – I do not believe the two events were related! At the Group level we formed a Benefice Vision Team to explore ways in which we could better work together across the group - with one of the anticipated benefits being a greater resilience in times of change.

After several meetings we identified and agreed that we should, across the group, work on:-

1. A Children and Families worker focused on our three church schools. Funding and a common vision for this has been agreed and a job description and advert is in the process of being produced.
2. A collaborative approach to our admin processes and people. We are now meeting across the group as one admin team and Safeguarding team and seek to ensure that communication, resources, and technical skills are shared across the group.
3. A combining of skills across the group. We have begun to run joint marriage preparation and baptism preparation courses which have proved popular with those taking part and we will continue to advertise courses such as Alpha and Bible Studies across the group.
4. A conscious planned working to get to know one another better across the group. Currently we better advertise social events and services across the group but this is an area of our common life that we could work harder on to improve.

I have deeply valued the areas that we have worked on together – Richard, Andrew and I have monthly meetings at which we put the ‘world-to-right’ and enjoy one another’s company and encouragement; 2021 was the first year I managed to complete the Good Friday pilgrimage from Brockenhurst to South Baddesley worshipping in each of our Group churches; and monthly Choral Evensong are just a few of these working together moments – I hope more will naturally develop as the years go by, for such working together is good for us – it gives us a bigger vision of the Church; enables us to do together what we could not do alone; and is a source of joy and encouragement.

One of the highlights for me this year was attending the South Baddesley Fete at Pylewell Estate for the first time – what a wonderful occasion! One of the lowlights was Richard announcing his retirement - he has been, and remains, a wonderful colleague who has so generously given of his time and talents not only in organizing and leading church worship and events but also in the maintenance and development of the church and grounds.

As I reflect on a year of change and challenge I am reminded of a prayer that is placed on my desk – one I have mused over often during the last couple of years. As we prepare to continue to journey into the unknown with hope I share it with you:

Jesus, where are you taking me?
Into Joy?
Into pain?
I am afraid,
but to do anything other than go with you
would be to die inwardly,
and to look for wholeness apart from you
would be to lose my true self.
So I come to you,
protesting and confused,
but loving you all the same.
You will have to hold on to me
as we walk together
through this compelling and frightening landscape of the kingdom of God.

Thank you for being on the journey through 2021 with all its challenges and change....

Revd Simon Newham