

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING 2010

Introduction

Our new Bishop, Alan Smith is now getting to know his Diocese and has recently visited Ampthill Deanery as part of this exercise. However, having an eye to general trends in our own parish it is apparent that we are in gradual decline. This has an impact on resources both in terms of manpower and finance. On the upside we do have new faces in our congregations and we are pleased they have come to join us and some are already making their own particular contribution to the life and witness of the Church here in Flitwick. We must address the decline and not sit here watching it happen or re-arranging deckchairs.

Vision for Action

The PCC regularly has this item on its agenda and engages us all in thinking about God's mission. However, the Diocesan Initiative under the title of VFA is coming to an end and our new bishop, has already set in motion a number of mission initiatives throughout the Diocese. Of course, the mission of the Church goes on whatever labels we give to it. I intend to speak with the PCC about ways in which can regain our confidence to proclaim the Gospel here in Flitwick.

Stewardship

Following on from the apparently successful Stewardship Renewal appeal in 2009 we continue to remain very grateful for all the support our congregations and casual givers make. The use of yellow envelopes for casual/regular givers has continued to make a big difference to income through giving. We are pleased that our online programme for recording donations and claiming recovery of tax on Stewardship is working well. Don & Mary McKeand have undertaken the task of regular recording of donations. However, as I say each year, giving is a very vulnerable area of church life as members can so quickly move away, leave the church or die. The reduction of the basic rate of income tax April 2008 meant that the Chancellor proposed a scheme of transitional Gift aid meaning that we have been able to claim the full 28% tax paid on gift Aided donations. We are not sure if this will continue. Our domestic budget for 2010 is again showing a deficit and although we have had quite a good response from our congregations to increase their regular giving, it is obvious that we are not keeping pace with the demands of running our Church. Based upon last years figures, it cost around £170 a day to run the Church and we received about £159 per day. We need more people to support us, plus continued generous and even sacrificial giving, if we are to continue what we currently do. Our financial resources are therefore dwindling fast and we still have considerable work to be done. Of course faith comes into all this, without which we would not be the Christian Community that we are called to be.

Christian Education

There were no Confirmations in 2009 but this year we hope that we shall have 5. (4 young people and one adult) Lent Courses are in full swing in the parish under the label of Challenge Bible studies. Additionally some church members are receiving a daily Bible text, again under the Challenge initiative in the Diocese. These are all meant to enable us to deepen our faith and to learn how to make a difference because of it.

Church Attendance

As I have already mentioned, there is another small decline in attendance in the past year. As you will see from the PCC report on average attendance at Communion the figures indicate that, with St Andrew's included, it was **62**. (**15** at St Andrews and **47** at St Peter & St Paul) Some people attend but are not recorded as they do not take Holy Communion. The trend does seem to be one that continues to fall.

People

Last year I said that I intended to set up regular meetings throughout the year with our churchwardens to exchange information and concerns and to improve communications. I'm sorry to say that I only managed this once.

During the past twelve months the following people have died; Margaret Coutts, Maureen Hewitt and Val Catlin (only recently joined us and on ER) We miss them and are thankful for their fellowship, support and commitment. Other members now live elsewhere; Nora Feazey at Shefford, Geoffrey Feazey at Sandy, Olive Richardson at Tilsworth near Leighton Buzzard. We miss them and are thankful for their fellowship, support and commitment. Other members now live elsewhere; Nora Feazey at Shefford, Geoffrey Feazey at Sandy, Olive Richardson near Leighton Buzzard. The Revd. Chris and Jane Terry left us for Great Yarmouth and I am so thankful for their considerable contribution to our parish. We have some new members too who are already playing their part in Church life.

Regularly, many other people are prayed for and visited in the parish as we seek to support and uphold them in all sorts of situations.

House Communion are regularly taken to the sick, housebound and elderly, and also to those in Ferndale Nursing Home and the Day Centre in Ampthill. I am most grateful to the team who assist, with the Bishop's permission, in this ministry.

Organist & Choirmaster

Susan Sims, our organist and choirmaster, continues to produce little miracles with the choir. In conjunction with the RSCM members have taken part in some interesting choral events. Several have attained RSCM awards right up to the level of Deans Award. (Silver) I am very grateful to members of our choir for their commitment and leadership in worship and at weddings. New members of the choir are always welcome and it's particularly good to see so many playing their part.

Baptism Preparation

Sue Walker & Marion Tucker have been doing a wonderful job of looking after Baptism preparation. We are very grateful to them for taking up this important ministry and making it run so smoothly.

Children & Young people

The work and ministry of our Youth Group, is another very important part of our work with young people. We have now run into difficulties with lack of numbers and leaders and so this work is currently under review. Our Sunday School team also put in a lot of time and effort in seeing that our younger ones receive appropriate teaching on the Christian faith mixed with plenty of fun and laughter. As I have said in previous years, we must acknowledge the fact that, in common with many other churches, we are not attracting many new youngsters into the Church. Sterling work is being done to address this through Little Fishes and Little Bears Pram Services headed up by our church members. (Anne Roby, Jennie Frost, Enid Clark and Leslie Cogan, and others) We also hope that we have two new volunteers as leaders for Sunday School namely, Valerie McFarlane and Nancy Barrett. Family services seem to be running quite well and attracting some new faces.

Mother's Union

Regular meetings of our Mother's Union branch take place through the year, together with a monthly service of Holy Communion on the first Wednesday. MU members regularly undertake to prepare Mothering Sunday flowers and help make Christingles. The Mother's Union seek to underline the contacts we have through baptism by delivering anniversary cards to families in the parish. Other projects include knitting for the Premature Baby Unit at Luton & Dunstable Hospital and other appeals.

Pastoral Offices

The ministry of the parish also extends to many people on an occasional basis. Here are last year's figures (Jan-Dec 2009) for pastoral offices together with 2008 in brackets. A more detailed sheet with figures is also available. A decline is apparent in these figures.

Baptisms	42 (53) -
Thanksgiving for the gift of children	0 (0)
Marriages	12 (17) -
Blessings	0 (4) -
Thanksgiving for marriage	4 (0)
Confirmations	0 (3)
Funerals *	49 (57) -

* 22 church services & 27 crematorium services

Ecumenical

The local ministers from Ampthill and Flitwick meet regularly every six weeks or so to enjoy each others company and to plan for Ecumenical events in the area. These are very valuable meetings and help to forge the necessary closer relationships with each other to enable many things to happen. Pentecost in the Park continues to show promise and we are also looking at the Street Angel scheme for Ampthill.

In the community

The local schools continue to visit our church and I also go into them when requested. I continue to encourage civic links and work with other groups in the town. The Town Mayor's Civic service moved back into the church in 2009. I have also dedicated some new trees in the Cemetery in memory of local Councillors. The Royal British Legion (Flitwick Branch) holds an annual service of remembrance in the Town at which I officiate together with other ministers from local churches of other denominations.

Personal

The past year has seen me getting to grips with the implications of being both your vicar and Rural Dean. This can be rather demanding at times but on the whole I am enjoying both roles. The Bishop of St Albans has now invited me to become an Honorary Canon of the Cathedral and I will be installed on the 22nd May at Evesong. I wait with bated breath to see what this involves apart from the personal honour it confers upon me and which I much appreciate. Retirement is always in view and certainly by September 2014, providing that my health permits me to continue.

Thanks

Most of the ministry of this parish would not happen without the dedication and support of yourselves and many people not present here this evening. So, thank you to all who regularly help things along in the parish. The Mission and Ministry is ours from Christ and everyone makes their contribution, large or small, in a variety of ways that enrich all we seek to do.

This report will be published on the church website and if anyone wants a printed version of it, please ask.

Revd Michael Bradley
March 2010