

Vicar's APCM Report 2022

'Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. John 4:6

It's a great pleasure to give my first Vicar's report at my first APCM here at St John's. As many of you know I was licensed here by the Bishop of Hertford on 12th September 2021. Many of you will be thinking – well that is only 3 months he needs to report on, so I hope he will not be too long. I hope I will not disappoint, but there is also to remind you how much good there is to report on.

I would like to start by thanking you all for making me, Sophy and the boys feels so welcome here. It feels good to be part of a friendly, caring Christian Community.

Like every church in the world, the last two years have been quite a journey. For all of us they will have been tiring beyond imagining, and we all need time to sit, rest and be refreshed. Most of 2021 has been an especially tiring journey for a church without a Vicar.

So I would like to begin my giving my very sincere thanks to Churchwardens James and Jane, and to our Ministry Team who have carried us through the vacancy and the pandemic so far, and ensured that the parish was in a remarkably good state for the arrival of a new Vicar – I'm very thankful!

- to Jane who has been the source of knowledge and wisdom to guide us through the different safety aspects of our pandemic response,
- to David Nye who tirelessly arranged a fearsome array of visiting clergy to keep you intellectually entertained,
- to Lauryn who took to her bike to deliver pastoral support when needed,
- and to Anne for her prayerful resourcefulness.

Having to do all this when things seemed to be constantly shifting and at the drop of a hat was no mean feat. I know I had a break before beginning here, but you have not.

My special thanks to James, who after 7 years as Churchwarden, and the recruitment of 3 vicars – has decided to enjoy life from the pews for a bit. James, you managed to provide the parish with a clear strategic leadership and helped to guide the ship of Christ safely through troubled waters. Thank you. Also stepping down is Andrew Harbord as member of the PCC.

Our thanks also to Tim Coleman, our former Treasurer. I was speaking to Alex Dales, the Independent Examiner, the other day and she commended his very professional approach to the church accounts. We will of course miss him, but we will continue to pray for him and send something to him by way of thanks when we can.

Of course there are too many to thank individually now who all make St John's the place that it is. We are lucky to employ 3 members of staff – Roger as Direct of Music, Julie in the Office and Barbara who keeps the church hall clean. From those who come in unseen during the week to keep the church clean, through to those who arrange flowers, or keep the gardens looking so wonderful – we couldn't do it without you all.

When I was getting my hair cut not long after arriving, I said to the barber that he must have other parishioners here as well. He said, 'oh yes - they say you have a lot of ideas!'

So I must thank all of you for your forbearance for my 50 million ideas before breakfast. But whilst I may have a lot of ideas, it's a team effort that makes this place tick, and all I can do is encourage and suggest.

The last few months of 2021 were mostly spent sitting down at the edge of the well, as Jesus did, knowing we are tired, and noticing what was around that was being watered by the spring of water so how are we doing?

St Johns has not stopped proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Online and then both online and in person. Our Parish Eucharist is the focus of our worship. Our weekly gathering around the altar has been our first priority, which has grown to include other forms and times of worship. We are slowly growing in numbers, welcoming in new individuals and families, and thanks to Roger's guidance, we now have our choir singing for us weekly and enhancing our worship. A particular highlight were our Advent carols Service and our Nine Lessons and Carols. But its not just in our worship we proclaim the Kingdom of God. It is in our Ecochurch steadily proclaim our care of creation, it is in our desire to be a more inclusive church, and it is through things such as T@3 or Little Acorns.

The heart of St Johns and the kingdom is building community. Behind everything there is a desire to be a place where people come for refreshment and encounter with God. As a church we are open 7 days a week, and people do come in here to enjoy St John's. We held a welcome event for the community sharing all that is involved in being the church here. And let's not forget all those who volunteer on the many rotas, sharing the load of ministry but also serving each other too.

And if we are truly to be the kingdom here, we need to be a community of people desire of all ages. The pandemic has certainly made that harder, and serving our young people still remains hard. We have restarted our toddler group – a different day and time, with resounding success. We organised a Christmas Holiday Club and nativity play – giving something for our young people to enjoy. As of December we welcome an average of 13 children and young people each week. But it's about serving people of all ages, and it was wonderful that T@3 was able to restart under Margaret Creighton's guidance.

But as I finish you might wonder what 2022 might hold for St John's and what does the Vicar - with lots of ideas - have in mind. We need to remember that we drink from the living water which is Jesus Christ himself.

'Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

In this season of Lent, I encourage you all to draw near to the living water of Jesus Christ – he will sustain and refresh you on the journey you and I are on together.

I think St John's is on an exciting journey, and whilst I don't want to pre-empt what the Holy Spirit has in store for us, from what I have seen of St John's you are a community of phenomenal skills and commitment so who knows what might be possible for us to do for the Lord Jesus.

The first project is our re-ordering of our church building. Initially a response to enable choral singing during the pandemic, it has given us a chance to reflect whether the building reflects what we believe about God and how we worship and pray. What does it say about the place of the Eucharist, the place of children and families or those in a wheel-chair, about music?

The second project is the new Parish Centre. The PCC have voted to restart Project Phoenix, and this is a real opportunity to serve the community in which we live. Of course there is anxiety about the money,

and a lot of unknowns, but if the Lord's builds the house, who are we to stand in His way? so perhaps it is a chance to pray and put our trust in the God who provides.

The last and most important thing, is giving ourselves time to reflect on what it means to be St John's as a community of people in which all are invited and welcome, and what it means to be the church here in Southdown. During this year we will be looking at producing a 2-year Mission Action Plan with out aims as a church, so watch this space.

There is much to be done, and much to be, but if we are to do any of it all, we must first draw close to the well which is the living water of Jesus Christ himself.

And so let us pray

In the dry wildernesses of our lives, in the days of heat and thirst,
you offer us living water.

Thank you, gracious and generous God.

When we begin to doubt your presence, and grumble that your love is unreliable,
you offer us living water.

Thank you, gracious and generous God.

When life's regrets and the bad choices we have made leave us feeling excluded and unworthy,
you offer us living water,

Thank you, gracious and generous God.

When circumstances, or the inhumanity of others, have left us alone and wounded,
you offer us living water,

Thank you, gracious and generous God.

We thank you and praise you, O God,
that how ever we may thirst,
what ever we may need to satisfy our souls,
you offer it freely and abundantly in Christ;

So we drink deep of the living water
and, as we draw from your wells,
we seek to pass the cup to others
who, like us, are thirsty for your grace.

Amen