

APCM: Parish Priest's 2017 Report (for 2018 Meeting)

After a year of significant change in 2016 in the North Hampshire Downs Benefice, but also for us here in the United Parish, 2017 was a year of consolidation as the new ministry team settled into working together and in their various parishes, and I completed my first year in the United Parish since Reverend Jane Leese's retirement. It was only once thrown into the deep end that I truly discovered what I had grasped of serving God's people in a parish and what I had still to discover. I believe I have now done the rounds of all the administrative tasks that sit alongside the role and in truth I have relished the learning. There will always be new aspects to a Pastoral ministry however long one is in post, and I am privileged to walk alongside people at the best, and also at some of the most difficult, times of their lives.

I had gone forward for selection for training for ministry firmly convinced that at this stage of my life God was calling me to an ordained but supporting, part-time role. After two bouts of advertising it proved impossible to find a part-time House for Duty minister to replace Jane, and after conversations with Bishop David, Archdeacon Richard and our Team Rector Simon, I agreed to be licensed Associate Minister in the United Parish for a five year period, taking me to my second – and final! - retirement. The Licensing service on 3 September was a wonderful occasion, with moments of legal solemnity, a deeply moving renewal of my commitment to serve the people of God through worship, mission and pastoral care, and moments of great joy. I'm very grateful to all those who attended to make this such a memorable moment for Lewis and me, and to all those who contributed to the arrangements on the day, not least the amazing food. Thank you also for the beautiful gifts presented to me: a Bible and a home communion set from the Parish, and some beautifully inscribed chimes from Sing UP, all of which I cherish.

Although not formally launched in the Benefice until January 2018, the second half of 2017 saw the ministry team meeting each Wednesday morning to absorb our understanding of Benefice of the Future and some early work to prepare for the launch. We have defined who we think we are as a Benefice (our "DNA – a map of the building blocks on which the life of our Benefice is built), our Vision of where we will be as a Benefice in 5 years' time, and a map of those five years and what we hope to achieve in each. It is a privilege for our Benefice to be chosen as one of the three in the Diocese to be part of this project, as it is to be part of the ministry team leading the project in this Benefice. This is of course a massive piece of work, and one which the ministry team is committed to seeing through without compromising in any way our first calling to ministry in the villages in which we serve.

Part of the Benefice of the Future project was to recruit a Youth Pastor and Helen Chatfield started with us in November. She hit the ground running and in just a few short months has made an amazing impact, particularly within the schools in the Benefice. Helen has visited most of our churches and has also helped with planning and being part of the team on the day for our "For all at 4" informal service at Mapledurwell, as well as Messy Church. Helen is funded directly by the Benefice, a significant contribution to her annual costs coming from the United Parish, and in particular Mapledurwell.

Again as part of the Benefice of the Future project we will see the arrival of a curate, Helen O'Sullivan, once she is ordained in July 2018. I shall enjoy working alongside Helen and acting as her Training Incumbent on a day to day basis. What Jane gave me, I can now pass on to Helen.

We may feel that for various reasons our numbers are depleting at Sunday services, but thanks to your encouragement and commitment, we have not stood still. We have enjoyed several special services on fifth Sundays, as well as Plough, Eco, Patronal and Pet services, and our new Informal Service called "For all at 4" at Mapledurwell on 4th Sundays. Added to that there was adult confirmation at the Cathedral in November, a busy and lively Advent and Christmas, and we have just left behind us an incredibly full Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

Our choir, Sing Up, goes from strength to strength and we are always blessed to have them with us in our worship as they travel around the Parish and participate in Benefice choirs at Benefice services. It has been particularly heart-warming to see more and more of you prepared to worship in other churches of the United Parish when there is no service in your 'home' church. It is noticeable and I very much appreciate that the United Parish joins in Benefice services and other Benefice events such as the Lent Course in good number. Many of you are also involved in other ways, such as the working group to define the role of a Youth Pastor, some of you are on the leadership team of the Benefice of the Future project, and the like. We are coming together more as a United Parish, and many of you are making a greater contribution to Benefice life too. Thank you.

A lot of work and much love goes into looking after our churches and churchyards, and I would like to thank all concerned. We know from our many visitors that our churches are much admired.

In 2017 the aMAP was launched and work was done at Deanery Synod level to use these to review and develop a new dMAP. We had intended to review our pMAP once the new dMAP was in place, but this work has been delayed until after the launch of the Benefice of the Future project so that we can take into account what new and different priorities this may bring. There will certainly be a focus on the "missing generations", the under 40s, and we are asked to make family and children's work a priority.

Home Groups in Greywell and Mapledurwell continue, albeit the group in Mapledurwell would welcome new members to have a larger group. And last but not least Messy Church in the school holidays is well attended – around 20 children sometimes more - and is great fun for organisers, parents and children alike. 2017 was a somewhat quiet year for occasional offices: weddings (4), baptisms (9), funerals (14), and burial of ashes (4).

It is always a risky business picking out people to thank in particular, but I cannot let this moment go without special mention of all the Churchwardens (and "pseudo" churchwardens) who are a great support and source of all wisdom to us all in the parish, but particularly to me. There are a great number of you who contribute to the life of the church in a myriad of different ways, and I am grateful to you all. I am sure you would all agree that Sing Up has gone from strength to strength and the choir's singing really adds to our worship, so thank you to Nick and Monica. I would also like to thank Nick for all that he does behind the scenes to help me with a number of jobs, from service schedules to producing orders of service and much in between. I thank our VCC treasurers and our PCC treasurer, Jon, for all that he does to keep our finances and financial reporting on track, and for his guidance and patience with the many questions I send his way. And finally, my thanks to Joyce who as well as being a very efficient secretary to the PCC, does a number of other tasks such as the church information for The Villager, and the monthly service and hymn planning. It's wonderful to have such willing help with these administrative jobs.

I thank you all for coming together as a team to make sure that all that needs to be done, gets done. You are amazing! Thank you also for your friendship, kindness and support and for making worship, mission and sharing the love of Christ in these villages such a joy. I am delighted to be serving God's people in this place.

Every blessing, and in Christ's peace

Linda

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