

**Parish of St Nicolas Cranleigh**  
**APCM 2017 – RECTOR’S REPORT**

I have now celebrated my fourth Harvest Festival with you, my fourth Christmas, and most recently my fourth Easter! So here we are, at my fourth APCM, and delivering my fourth Rector’s Annual Report – doesn’t time fly when you’re having fun!

Each year, I have underpinned my reports with passages from scripture. In 2014 it was from John 10: *“I have come that you may have life, life in all its fullness”*. In 2015 there were two passages - firstly, from John 16:33: *“ . . . in the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have conquered the world”*, and then from Revelation 21:6 and 7: *“To the thirsty I will give water from the spring of life, as a gift. This is the victor’s heritage; (that) I will be their God and they will be my people”*. And then last year from the First Letter of Peter, Chapter 1, Verse 3, one of the great ‘rallying’ passages of the New Testament: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”*. Now each of those passages in some way reflected aspects of how I was feeling at the time, and of what I felt I needed to say to you in those particular years! And this year I am going to underpin what I want to say with a verse from the passage which I used in the opening worship, from Paul writing to the Church in Philippi: *“Therefore, my brothers and sisters . . . stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved . . . Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* This passage has much to teach us as a church!

There is no doubt that the church in our country is under the most enormous pressure that it has experienced in any of our lifetimes: falling numbers, crumbling buildings, extraordinary financial challenges, the relentless onslaught of secularisation! All of these things are the norm for Churches the length and breadth of Britain! Which is why we need, more than ever to *“ . . . stand firm in the Lord.”*

But at St. Nicolas we have much to give thanks for: our Sunday attendance statistics show us to be in the top 15 churches in the Diocese of Guildford, those numbers have remained relatively static across the past 10 years. We are largely within reach of being able to pay our way. We are experiencing growth in numbers of young families attending on a Sunday morning. We are generously staffed by our Ministry Team, and well-resourced with volunteers doing most of the things we need done day by day to keep going as a Church. All of which means that we must continue to *“ . . . Rejoice in the Lord always.”*

Paul reminds the Philippian Church that *“The Lord is near.”* As a Church, we are constantly being reminded that God has been faithful to us through generations, and continues to be. Our PCC endeavours to seek God’s will in all that we do, staying close to him in our own discipleship, and secure in the knowledge that he is allowing his Holy Spirit to work through and in us.

Inevitably, there are times when we feel down-hearted. But again, St Paul reminds the Philippian Church, *“Do not worry about anything.”* Worrying is a worldly response, not a Christian one, and we must learn to have faith and to have trust.

It can be very easy to forget the power of prayer, and again our PCC have been working hard to support everything that we do, and seek to do, by prayer! We now have a Communion service before each PCC meeting to offer the meeting and its business to God, and we have both our Parish Mission Prayer and our PCC Prayer which we pray at the beginning of each meeting. So, *“ . . . in everything by prayer . . . let your requests be made known to God.”* If we ask God for what we need, so long as what we ask is in response to his will, he will provide! This has been crucial to our past, it is crucial today and it will be crucial to our future! Pray, pray pray! We must learn how to do it effectively and unstintingly, to support all that we do in God’s name! And there is a wonderful end-result to all of this, which is both corporate and personal: that *“ . . . the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

I am going to offer you two lists now – the first is a list of things that have encouraged me in the past year and the second a list of things that encourage me as we look to the future. Don’t get me wrong, there are still things that discourage me, but I would rather not talk about them tonight – there is time to deal with them prayerfully in the months ahead!

So, things that have encouraged me in the past year:

- Having Ian join the team, who has been a pleasure and delight to work with.
- Our continued work with children and young families. (things like Open the Book, our groups and our brilliant holiday club).
- The way we have managed, through the generosity of our volunteers time, to keep most of our young people’s work going, despite having a vacancy in our Youth Minister post.
- Having almost fully implemented our new PCC team and sub-team Structure.
- Having developed our Parish ‘Vision’ into a ‘Mission Strategy’ with realistic and achievable goals, and a real understanding of where we are hoping to go for the next 5 years.
- Working with our new enlarged team of Pastoral Assistants, which is now led by Tricia.
- Celebrating 100 years of the MU Branch in November
- Our new-look Parish Magazine and improved communications channels.
- The Spirit of warmth and generosity in the ecumenical scene in the Village.
- Seeing new Church members coming forward and getting involved in the life of the Church.
- Outreach into the Village through the Flower Festival, Christmas Tree Festival and Summer Concert Series.
- Seeing deeper engagement with God through meetings like the Advent Reflections and the Lent talks.
- The response to my personal appeal to help with the funding of our Youth Minister post. (12 people have responded and with the recovery of Gift Aid, almost £13,000 PA has been pledged for the next 5 years)

And things that encourage me as I look forward to the rest of 2017 and beyond:

- Appointing a new Young People's Minister to build on the foundations laid by Georgie and to grow the role forward.
- Welcoming Myles Owen to the Ministry Team as an MSE.
- Addressing the shortfall in our finances through a mini planned giving initiative in May
- Renewed emphasis in our teaching on prayer and discipleship.
- Completing some long-overdue works to the building (particularly the restoration of the Lych Gate and South Aisle roof).
- Reaching out through another Summer series of concerts and a 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Tree Festival.
- Launching the 1170 Initiative.

There is one other significant factor from this year which doesn't fall within anything else I have been saying, and that is to mention that since we last met for the 2016 APCM we have conducted the funerals of no less than 16 regular worshipping church members! This is a staggeringly high figure – almost 5% of our Church membership! As well as representing a huge amount of personal tragedy and loss, it represents for all of us a massive 'dent' in our church membership and in our personal circles of friends. We have all been touched by these losses, and our hearts continue to go out to all who have suffered most closely from these sad losses.

I'm going to end with the traditional 'thank yous'!

- To my family, and especially to Kate, who manages so remarkably to balance the rigours of a full time teaching job with the demands of being the Rector's wife, and whose constant support, encouragement and critique keeps me on track.
- To Katherine and Tony, my fantastic Churchwardens this year, who have Supported me unequivocally through another year as your Rector.
- To our fantastic Ministry Team – Ian, Tricia, Peter, Edna, Judy, and, of course Georgie, who was with us until January.
- To Fiona for bearing the brunt of being the first point of contact in the parish Office
- To Jeff, for his hard work and clarity as Treasurer and Rob our PCC Secretary
- To Herb, as Chair of the Finance Team, and for the painstaking work that he does in administration of and retrieving of Gift Aid from the Inland Revenue.
- To Sue and Colin for their hard work in the busy Verging department.
- To Michael, our inspirational Director of Music.
- To Margie for all the different things that she does, but especially today for her work on the Electoral Roll.
- To our Pastoral Assistants, PCC, musicians, intercessors, readers, servers, bell-ringers, cleaners, flower arrangers, gardeners and lawnmowers, coffee providers and anyone I have inadvertently missed out, Thank You!

*"Therefore, my brothers and sisters . . . stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved . . . Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."*

Roy Woodhams – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017