Rector’s report for APCMs 2021 Revd Annette Shannon

I am writing this report as we approach 18 months of working through some of the most difficult and unprecedented days we have experienced. COVID-19 disrupted all our lives and created many new ‘learning curves’ for us to negotiate. One in particular has been the general need to learn, very quickly how to use communication technology in ways none of us would have predicted. I am delighted that we had a congregation of over20 joining at most Zoom services, and sometimes as many as 40. This does not include those who subsequently watched the recording, or who read the circulated materials. So many of our traditional means of communicating – coffee and lunch groups; pastoral visits; services; PCC and other meetings – have been severely curtailed, if not stopped altogether. The coffee mornings on line with guest speakers was well received and enabled us to reconnect with people who had been part of the benefice history.

So what has been going on? Below, I summarise the areas of work we have found God leading us into over the past year:

**Schools**

Whilst it is enormously frustrating not to be able to visit schools, the pastoral care possibilities have continued. Local teams have supported their schools in a variety of ways from recording Open the Book stories, joining in or leading collective worship on Zoom, representing the church at outdoor, summer, leaver’s services to present leavers with gifts, to adapting new ways to fulfil their roles as governors. At Advent all children in Sproughton and Tattingstone were provided with an Advent bags.

We have continued to offer pastoral support to the Head Teachers and their staff.

At this moment in time, I believe our relationships are stronger than they were a year ago and this bodes well for possibilities once a level of ‘normality’ returns, hopefully later this summer.

**‘Every day Life’ of the rector**

During the average week I continued to engage with my colleagues in all the work generally

associated with a priestly responsibility.

This included:

Leading services (face to face, on Zoom or Facebook), occasional offices and preparation for these.

Pastoral care, mainly on the phone.

Planning service rotas and attending meetings

Parish meetings on Zoom

Chapter and Deanery Synod meetings

I undertook a number of courses for continuing professional development including a series by CPAS, and a six week course which was supported by a diocesan grant set up by Lutheran Seminary. I followed a new diocesan leadership safeguarding course and updated my skills on using Zoom.

I led a Start and a Lent course, and took part in a Faith Pictures Course

I led monthly mentoring meetings with this year’s cohort of curates, and co-led and helped plan four Initial Ministerial Education days for curates.

I interviewed several candidates for ministry as part of the diocesan discernment process and attended associated meetings.

I conducted Ministerial Development Reviews.

Until January I continued in my role as Mission Accompanier for Westerfield, Tuddenham and Witnesham. I resigned In January to take on the role of assistant rural dean

I continue as part of a Bishop’s Focus team looking at Focal Ministry and on a Focus team with Dean Joe Hawkins to look enhancing church response to funerals.

**Looking Ahead**

The coming year will continue to challenge us as we try to capture all that is central to

our life as Christians and work out what the effects of Covid will mean for the months that

lie ahead. I’ve had ample opportunity over the last few months to reflect on this. It seems

important to me that being Church in the 21st Century requires us to be clear about

where our tradition meets the needs of modern life – and where it doesn’t! We need to

educate ourselves about the questions and issues that are relevant for tomorrow’s church

and society. To insist on living in the past will simply add to the decline in Church interest

that has systematically occurred since the Second World War. The future of our churches,

their survival and development, are intrinsically bound up with our own personal growth in

Faith, our ability to inspire all with whom we live and work and our willingness to change. I

believe this is what Christ calls us to embody and to this end, I will continue to work with

you and pray for the life of our parishes in the coming year as we negotiate some changes.

Security in Sproughton Church has now been improved so that it can be left open on a Wednesday, as Covid restrictions are lifted the church openings will be increased to allow the community access to the building.

**Thank yous**

To those whose constant support, encouragement and critique kept me on track. I wanted to give a special mention to Revd. Tony who has been inspirational in his service to the benefice, to my fantastic Churchwardens who have supported me and provided response to my endless emails, to our incredible Ministry Team for their ingenuity and care for their parishes and for each other, to Hayley coping so well with the immense burden of administration of weddings this year as regulations changed and couples postponed their weddings many more than once, to our treasurers for the painstaking work that they do monitor spending and retrieving Gift Aid from the Inland Revenue, to our pastoral supporters, PCC, intercessors, readers, cleaners, flower arrangers, gardeners and lawnmowers, coffee and cake providers for the ways in which they have found ways to still be active in ministry despite having to comply with regulations, and of course anyone I have inadvertently missed out. I sincerely thank you.

I end with two quotations from the Bible that resonate for with me as we face the challenge ahead.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:5

God, teach us to see what is hidden in plain sight. Fill us with faith and clear our vision so we can see our lives and others through Your eyes. Help us to be aware of Your presence, in our homes, your church, our communities, our workplace, the world and remind us that we have been appointed for this time and place by You to bring light in the darkness and introduce people to You through the way we live our lives and lead your church. Amen.