

Vicar's Report 2024

I'd like to begin by thanking so many members of St Mary's, both PCC and beyond, for what has been a year of interesting and promising developments within the parish.

Alongside the usual suspects – PCC in general, Alan, our temporary treasurer as of 30 years ago, Michelle the Gift Aid and Social person, James, the unflappable and highly-organised churchwarden, Rob, as administrator and many other things, including bin-emptier and hall heating programmer, keeping our health and safety and safeguarding under watchful eye, and our staff of 'ministerial volunteers' (including our returning former curate) – I'd like to draw attention to the work put in by Shân and her textiles group and (again) Shân and her Children's Work group.

There's lots of folk, from choir and servers and readers and bellringers and sidespeople through to cleaners, fixers and menders, tea-makers, social outreachers and visitors of one sort and another. It's a huge list. I think many would be surprised at how much very active ministry there is going on in the parish beyond the obvious, and it is key to both our vocation and our continued flourishing. As an example of all sorts of folk just getting stuck in and doing their bit, it's a good one.

Partly because it fits in well with our work towards being a resource to a much wider area. For anyone who has not been able to keep track of news from Lincoln, there's a huge restructuring going on in the diocese in order for us to remain solvent. People often ask why we have to send money to Lincoln when it's hard enough paying the bills – the truth is that for the last 50 years, money at the centre has been insufficient to meet the costs of putting parsons on the ground. Whether it's 'Grantchester' or 'Father Brown', the world the Church now inhabits bears no resemblance to those rosy hints of 1950's drama. We may look back wistfully to the glory days of a hundred people at Sunday worship, and a choir of 40, but when I tell folk in the diocese that we have a usual Sunday attendance of around 60, the reaction is always, *'Well, you're doing alright then.'*

That leaves us in a position of great responsibility – we're the only parish in the whole of North Lincolnshire to put our heads above the parapet and go for this Type 1 Church role. That, I think, says a lot about the spirit within the parish, and I'll come back to this in a moment or two.

It's hardly a secret that summer 2025 will mark my 20 years in the parish, and my own big 70. It would be very unusual for someone to remain incumbent after their 70th birthday, and it would be a remarkable person who still had the vision and flexibility to do so. I'm not such a person (though I will, I hope be remaining in ministry). The job has changed out of all recognition since I came here: it needs a new pair of eyes. Over the course of the next year-and-a-bit, then, we do need to be developing our understanding of what we're here for as a resource to the wider church, a process which will continue after I retire.

I understand from the Archdeacon that, more likely than not, there'll be no permanent appointments made in Yarborough deanery for three years. There are several people on fixed-term contracts, and not everyone is yet in quite the right place. Julie has gone to Brigg for a three-year period to see if the congregations of the Brigg group can be supported to rejuvenate their vision after a long vacancy, and that's just one of the ingredients in the mix.

We won't be undergoing the long period of uncertainty - as we did in the past - after summer '25, though. When I depart these shores for a garden shed somewhere, we will immediately have a named oversight minister to support and guide us through the next bit of our discernment process – which, as I've said, is *'What does it mean to be a Church resourcing a much wider area than its own immediate benefice?'*

If that sounds like a huge cliff to climb, think again. We're already doing such things and exploring how to build on them. Here is a (non-exhaustive) list of what's already going on in terms of 'resourcing':

- We've provided a weekly meditation and intercession/Sunday readings/prayers list by email to not only our own six parishes but also to the Kirton and Triangle group during its vacancy and to the Brigg group ongoing.
- We've been instrumental in setting up training, spirituality and adult education workshops accessible to people beyond our own parishes. Safeguarding is next on the hit list once Lincoln catches up with us!
- We're in the process of setting up an educational area for schools' work – including IT provision – for KS 1,2 and 3, and the resources for KS 1 & 2 – you must have all seen the vestment rail – are unparalleled this side of the Cathedral (on whose education suite our work is modelled, consciously or unconsciously). We are actively investigating purpose-designed materials for school visits to parish

churches, including the discreet use of QR codes to explain the significance of items within (and outside) the building.

- We've provided 'back-office' services for parishes without reprographics or IT facilities, producing service booklets, posters and other publicity, model policies and all manner of odd bits and pieces.
- We've made available downloads of adult education material via the website, as well as guides to baptism, marriage and the like. More is in the offing.

This probably ticks a lot of the boxes for the areas a resource church should be getting involved with.

Over the last year or so, a number of other promising avenues have started to be explored:

- Some very specific -and not clergy-led – Evening services on themes for Advent, Lent and so on, have taken place, and more are intended;
- a planned launch of an 11.00 *short* family service;
- The re-launch of our carer and toddler group;
- A new relationship with the Ropewalk and with Wilderspin to take advantage of (a) our history and (b) our position as an 'open 8.00-6.00' space for exhibitions, displays and the like.
- The refurbishment of the Church Hall (grants are being chased constantly) and the renewal of various aspects of our Church building (of which the excellent Children's area is one example).
- And our Internet presence, via FB and our website, is solid. There were 109 visits our website yesterday, nearly 300 all told over the last week, and nearly 900 in the last month. And when time permits, we have a lot more to go on it – a Church guide, for one thing.

It's easy to get ground down by the size of the task and the general doom and gloom which seems to surround Church life in more or less every denomination. We seem to be building an inclusive, generous and serving community here where people are encouraged to explore the mystery of God with as few strings attached as possible. It has been – and continues to be – both exciting and a lot of fun to work with you all, and I thank you for your companionship and work for the Gospel and our community.