

## Team Vicar report 2023

This time last year I was recovering from my first bout of Covid and trying to adapt to shifting ground beneath my feet. The last year has continued in a similar vein and as I reflect on it as a whole I feel that I'm now in a place of transition, discernment and change as life circumstances have evolved. I have now been ordained for a decade so it is perhaps fitting that my ministry has also evolved and focus broadened.

I never fully recovered from Covid and a lot of the last year has been a rollercoaster of challenges, achievements and issues, both health-wise and workwise. There has been a lot of cause for sadness, confusion and disappointment but also some incredible moments of clarity, affirmation and joy. Last May in my role as Women's Advocate for Durham Diocese I attended the National Association of Diocesan Advisors in Women's Ministry conference (NADAWM) and it was an amazingly uplifting and inspiring time to gather with colleagues and share concerns, prayer, worship and plans together. I was also elected to be the North-East rep on the executive committee so I'm the link for Yorkshire, Durham and Newcastle dioceses. The conference was blessed with some impressive, humble and wise speakers and gave me lots to think about.

In July it was time for General Synod again and I gave my maiden speech, on the subject of equality and gender justice plus the impact and transformation that might be enabled if the church would fund administrative support for clergy.

Across the summer months it was very encouraging and life-giving to spend time chatting with members of the community outside our churches as we met for breakfast club.

At the end of the summer I took some time away from regular duties to focus on handling some personal stuff and responding to some accusations that had been raised against me. This was a pretty horrible time and the source of a lot of pain, anxiety and stress, which I'm still working on my recovery from.

We had a clergy study day in October and I helped to facilitate and lead a workshop on the diversity and equality agenda and how this interests with our own experience, practice and priorities welcoming all people. There is much work to be done in broadening and deepening the understanding of disability, race, gender, ethnicity discrimination and how embedded it is.

Cuddys Lunch Club and Thursday Morning Prayer were a highlight of the soggy autumnal months and it was lovely seeing St Cuthbert's growing in value to their community. It was also fantastic welcoming two new families there and seeing our average age drop through the floor suddenly!

Christmas came and went before I'd blinked and the time in the sun couldn't come soon enough as my household limped towards it with news of the Beacon Project's funding being withdrawn and Tony being made redundant hanging over us.

The Ash Wednesday service of Ash & Glitter was however a beautiful profound service that honoured the journey we had been on together and it was especially valuable to have Becca Cooper join us for that service and be there to pray together as we end one thing and begin another.

February was also General Synod again and I accidentally found myself triggering international news coverage on the appropriateness of including gender neutral language in our worship. Don't believe all of what you read though, some of the articles are very much inaccurate and less than helpful! I also took part in the two day debate around how the Church responds to the Living in Love and Faith process. It was an immensely overwhelming, emotional, challenging, encouraging, sad, difficult, hard few days but I am honoured to have been a part of it and hope I did justice for those who voted for me to represent them.

Within all of this it has been profoundly clear that while I often struggle with feeling like I "fit in" I am also very clearly valued by some, precisely because of that. I am constantly challenged by my call to the priesthood in the Church of England yet just as often affirmed that it is what God wants me for. Ministry can be very lonely and painful, this last year has removed any remaining rose tinted glasses I had on that score, but it is also incredibly rewarding. It has been such an honour to walk with and witness the growth in faith, skills and confidence of so many of you. I cannot name you all but some I must mention as you have impacted me immensely and have been such a blessing to me, far more than you may realise; Bev, Paula, Lillian, Tommy, Marjorie, Hayley, Tobias, Nikki, Derek, Anthony and Erik. Each in different ways you have all inspired and encouraged me this last year. Thank you.

I doubt that I will be here this time next year, as I am getting the clear sense it is time for me to move on. But I will hold this parish in my prayers of gratitude for far longer than I have served here. And you're stuck with me a while longer yet.

*Rev'd Chantal Noppen 9th April 2023*