

## Annual Review 2017/8 in St. Mary's Diss

At last year's APCM I outlined the following objectives for 2017. They were;

1. Furthering the designs of The Ambo
2. Consolidating the work of The Team Council
3. Strengthening the work of the Administrator and the Office Communications
4. Envisaging a creative way forward for our church buildings
5. Develop a new approach to our old connect groups and how we learn new forms of hymns.

As I report on these noble objectives I am reminded about how I ended my report last year. I reminded myself that *'all our plans must be subject to God's good purposes, and however much the clergy desire such things, if it is not of God it simply will not come to pass.'* Reflecting that much of these aims has not been achieved in any great measure must surely suggest to us that the time was not right to further these ideas. The best laid plans can easily go off course. We have not, for example, furthered the work on the ambo – even though David Summers has not been slow in coming up with new ideas – and our Team Council has not worked quite so well. The desire to form a different form of music for worship has not been realised and, as yet we have not put pen to paper about re-ordering our buildings. Progress has been slow and at times ponderous, and yet I think the work of the Spirit has been evident, perhaps more than we might think.

Small steps have been taken and I would like to list what they are. We said we would try to create more space in the office for our administration to work more easily. Thanks largely to Janet Blight a wall was knocked down and there is now room for our Admin Team to work more effectively. Janet enlisted the help of John Taylor, Neal Gooch, John Curtis and many others to keep cost down and we now have a more effective space. We also have a second work station and Computer at which Gill Partidge can work alongside Jan. Small steps but very useful in making our administration more productive. As we prepare to receive five more parishes in the very near future the work of that office will need every inch of space it has just achieved. And for those few who love to moan about the work that goes on in there I would simply ask them to be silent in their comments, pop in and do it for a day, and then apologise for any criticisms they feel moved to ever make again.

The reformed *Connect* groups now called *Discover* have been a really splendid development in our learning together. We now have four sustainable groups, one of which meets in the Rural parishes. It's lovely to see how this has become useful to those who attend amassing

forty people on a regular basis. Over this last year we have looked at the spirituality of the Saints and engaged during Lent in a challenging Course designed by our Vicar Wendy about how the Church needs to become more obviously Christian rather than churchy. That learning is one of the three great expressions of Christianity I strongly commend these groups to all.

Whilst it is true that as yet the PCC has not put pen to paper about how our church buildings can be developed, it has made quite a few steps towards bringing this about. Over this last year all members of the PCC have tried to visit lots of churches to see how they are making their buildings more fit for the purpose of mission and ministry. As a result of these visits the PCC at its November meeting formulated some key objectives as to what they want to achieve here in our plant. I list them for you to hear and maybe comment on during 'any questions'.

### **1) The Church Space**

- Alter the South Porch and level.
- Improve outside space between south and west doors, with perhaps a statue and improve lighting.
- Ask Architect to advise us on the West Avenue awkward space and difficult steps into the nave (most funerals and weddings come in that way).
- Improve North porch with sloping floor from entrance to nave.
- Take out pews and level floor so nave space can be put to better use
- Architect be asked to advise on heating system.
- Improve the lighting in the nave.
- Modest hidden kitchen facilities at the west end of the church.

### **2) The Hall**

- Office
- Toilets (four)
- Shared Vestry space
- Secure storage for robes and music but make space flexible
- Bigger meeting room (refectory) with kitchen space but not enclosed kitchen.

Now, as I said earlier none of these ideas have yet to reach the drawing stage, they have all been unanimously agreed by the PCC to invite the DAC and Architect to move things forward. All this will take time and not be achieved in a hurry but it will be progressed because of the steps your PCC have made over this last year.

The whole reason for embarking on this journey, of course, started when we listened to our Bishop who asked all his parishes to 'dream dreams' concerning the future of mission and ministry in their respective parishes. Bressingham, Fersfield and North Lopham are also doing similar things which is useful that we are not alone. What he and many of us are now more and more acutely aware is that if we do not reach out to our communities and start sharing our resources with them we shall become utterly obsolete and become extinct. In this respect there is very little choice left to us, which is why your PCC will be pursuing this with vigour in this next year.

But another reason why there has been a slower pace over this last year – and I suspect will be so in this next year – is that the members of your Ministry Team are significantly changing, and this of course will inevitably change the pace to slow. At the end of last year we had to say farewell to Jayne Hinds who was a wonderful colleague to work with. She was so creative and thoughtful and many of us feel her loss. And at the start of this year we learned that our wonderful Vicar Wendy Evans announced her retirement from ministry owing to poor health. She not only leaves us at the end of this month but she leaves an enormous hole in the work we do here, and not least in our hearts as well. More will be said about her great contribution at another time, but for the purpose of this report we must thank her for so much and pay tribute to her ministry. Her going will inevitably reduce what we can offer and I crave everyone's understanding that what you might think should be done will almost certainly not be done, so please don't burden those of us left to do things with unjust complaining. This next year will be about surviving and managing and very little else! I say this forcefully because at the same time this year dear Maggie Swayze has suffered serious ill health, and whilst she is showing some real promising signs of recovery she too will not be able to do as much as she once did. Now whilst I know very few people will indulge in Rector bashing there will always be the one or two. Please can I ask all of you to remind such people, when you find them having their little whinge usually in this very room, that the work load now is so overwhelming that no one can be expected to be 'all things to all men'.

For my own part this next year will first and foremost be about finding a successor to Wendy and then in helping that person to settle in. Such embedding does not happen automatically; time and care on my part will be essential, and again, stating the obvious, if I'm doing that there will be many other things I will not be able to do. Also, at the mid point of last year Bishop Graham pressed upon me to train a new curate. I can tell you I needed a lot of persuading but in agreeing I am now able to report that Mr. Samuel Thorp, a twenty-five year old, at present training at Cranmer Hall Durham, will be joining us at the end of June as curate in the Diss Team Ministry. Good, I hear you say, more hands, less excuses from the Rector. But as many of you know and understand training a curate is a costly thing to do in terms of my time. Both he and an eventual Vicar will mean a completely new Team of people to work with which although exciting and beneficial to us all, yet a real challenge to myself in making it all work. I again, crave your understanding and compassion in the next few years.

As I start my own thirty-fourth year in ministry I am very conscious of how ministry is always in transition, never constant and predictable but frequently moving, adapting and evolving into what we do not know. Just as one thinks one has stability another great block is moved never to be replaced. In this respect every time someone dies or moves on, the landscape left behind can never be the same. This last year we have seen other great people move on; Graham Elliot, Terry Hickey, not to forget Mike Wilby, Reg Daikin and Kathleen Ling who left us for the eternal home. Each has played a part and each leaves a gap which causes loss for those of us who remain. Yet the loss is always an invitation to do something differently and this is what we must all embrace as this next year begins.

So the objectives for this next year will be modest but important. They are;

1. Establish a new Ministry Team with a curate and hopefully a new Team Vicar, and to help them both adjust to the ways we work.
2. Further our plans for re-developing our church building for Mission and Ministry.

### 3. Prepare our Congregations for Data Protection Principles.

There have indeed been significant steps over the last year for which we should give thanks, and there are lots of important moves happening in the present – not least the arrival of a curate and the search for a Team Vicar – we are also keeping upper most in our minds the need to do things differently when it comes to mission and ministry. As I have remarked in almost every report I have given in this parish change is not an easy thing to embrace but embrace it we must. My reassurance to you all is that change will be handled carefully and not rushed, but it will not be refused or denied either. We are in a process of transition and there is no alternative, but with God on our side, prompting us on, we have nothing to fear. We are pilgrims on a journey, as a hymn writer has put it, with companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load. In the spirit of this I commend my report to you.

Canon Tony Billett  
April 2018