

St Mary's Riverhead with Dunton Green Vicar's Report, APCM 2019

I have always been grateful to everyone who contributed to the life of St. Mary's over the years. No matter how great or small you feel your contribution is, please be assured that it is always valued. The other reports identify so much of the work and energy that has gone into the running of St Mary's over the year. Huge thanks to both those who are responsible for such roles, teams and key church matters, and to everyone mentioned in those reports. There are many things we can be grateful for. The Annual Parish Report will record many of those highlights over the past year.

However, I thank especially those whom I generally had day-to-day contact (sometimes frequently) over the past year. Diane Williams, John Curtis and then Alison Bull - wardens. Margaret Nicholas, Ronnie Todd, Robert McLintock and Stuart Wigley. I also thank Rev'd Anne Bourne, Rev'd Peter Flynn, Rev'd Anne Le Bas, Rev'd Serena Willoughby, Rev'd Elizabeth Pearce, and Rev'd Adie McCall - along with other ministers - who have kindly come to take services at St Mary's over the past year. Special thanks to Daphne Harrison our LLM, particularly as she seeks to look after the ministry and pastoral side of things during the Interregnum.

Thanks also go to our organists Janet Sharp, Nick Castell and Daniel Eaton and the choir for continuing to uphold St Mary's fantastic music tradition. A great privilege and joy to share the worship with you all. I also thank Kristi Jagodin and the UK Estonian Society's Mixed Choir for coming to sing for us. Congratulations to you for being accepted into this year's prestigious Song Festival this July in Tallinn. Koike Paremat! Still time for people to book and go and see this amazing five-yearly event.

Thanks, too, to the Monday prayer team, Bible Study Group, those who responded to the Archbishops' week of prayer "Our Father" and Christine for co-ordinating it magnificently.

The Sunday Club is, of course, our lifeblood for the future. We are so grateful to all who have set themselves apart to help bring light into the lives of our young people - the future of Christ's church here at St Mary's. Particular thanks to Ali Wakefield and everyone who set themselves apart on the various Sundays for this vital ministry.

I encourage you strongly to continue our links with Pastor Annika Laats, our brothers and sisters in Harju-Risti and Estonia generally. Invite them over and make a point of going across at some point to visit. These parish-to-parish visits are hugely rewarding and important.

Of course, you will have to encourage yourselves over the next few months during the interregnum and the development of the Three Parish Initiative.

When anyone speaks of the Old Testament, one – rightly – often thinks firstly of Moses. Hebrew Scripture, the Torah, is attributed to Moses. However, the relationship between him and Aaron is very significant. Moses one might say represents you - St Mary's - the community. The one commissioned by God to perform the tasks set you. Moses, like any human being, feels unworthy, unable; is questioning, argumentative and even sometimes doubts himself or God. Aaron the priest is given to Moses to support him. To perform the necessary rites and tasks and to serve Moses through his difficulties and doubts and feelings of inadequacy, in the work he has been given to do by God. Importantly, though, it is Moses' work, first and foremost.

Just as God called Moses, so Jesus calls his disciples. Once again - one might say, they represent you. So Jesus has called you, too. You are church and Jesus' disciples whether you have an incumbent in place or not.

To encourage and enable the disciples, of course, Matthew tells us Jesus gives them tasks and sends them out to accomplish them. This includes the teaching that they should give the places they enter their peace, or Shalom. This, I believe is key to being disciples.

At Jesus' post-resurrection appearance as recorded in John 20.19-23, Jesus gives his disciples his peace; his shalom. This is a word of power which includes profound and complex meaning. This is an echo of a previous instance in John when Jesus pronounces his peace upon his disciples.

In many ways, the modern word 'peace' doesn't cover it. Peace can be seen as really rather an imprecise, even new-age word. A valuable word in its own right, when it speaks of opposition to violence and injustice, but a word that doesn't carry the power of the scriptural *shalom*. This word amongst other things speaks of personal, household, family, business health and wellbeing; the provision and maintenance of justice. It is a greeting, certainly, but it involves not just the wishing upon the recipient of these things. By the simple voicing of the greeting, it includes a certain belief that such well-wishes will be actually and actively be enacted by the word being spoken. Shalom offered as a tangible and very real gift. Shalom pronounced; God speaks and it is so.

Meanwhile, the New Testament Greek translates it as *eiréné*. This, in effect, extends its meaning further to embrace concepts of an inner peace, a blessing; a word which, when shared, unites the Church community; and a word that will be instrumental in bringing about the phenomenal and astonishing change that Jesus initiated, and which we celebrate at Easter.

It is not simply well-wishing. It is a tangible and very real gift. Change *happened*. Shalom *happened*. Change *will come*. Shalom *will come*.

Any Church member and team is given similar responsibilities of being custodians and transmitters of God's peace, shalom, eiréné. You are expected, commanded, even, to go out into the world and spread it. Spread it wherever you go, wherever you find yourselves. In meetings, at interviews, in encounters in the high street; at school, in your homes, even in restaurants. Silently, or out loud... ...in the gesture of a handshake or a smile. Inwardly or outwardly – you are saying: God's peace be with you.

It is more than just a handshake. More than just a sign of friendship and community. It is that, too, of course, but it is also so much more. It is an engine-room. A powerful catalyst. Yeast in the Leaven. One of the most important means by which the power of God infiltrates and inhabits a fallen world. One of the most important ways, I believe, God forms Christians and church teams; empowers them and enables them to fulfil the work he has set them in his mission to the world.

This can help any parish member or team understand his/her or its role as a ministering community, rather than a community gathered around its minister. And all of this is of course, undertaken with the help and support and counsel and power and prayer of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit. Christ is by your side.

What God has begun - all those years ago when they first built St Mary's and God's people came up the hill and in through the doors, God will complete. He will complete it with your participation.

As I mentioned in last year's Vicar's report, at the Church of England's general Synod last year, they received a paper looking at reform and renewal. Here are the two key points they made and, i think, we should all take the time to read, consider, understand and pray over:

1) Until, together, ordained and lay, we form and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life in ways that demonstrate the Gospel we will never set God's people free to evangelise the nation.

2) Until laity and clergy are convinced, based on their *baptismal mutuality*, that they are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission, we will never form Christian communities that can evangelise the nation.

These points above make it very clear - this is YOUR church. YOU make it what it is. So, a special plea to every member of our church family, new and not-so-new. Please do offer yourselves in some way. You would be more than welcome, and will find it a fascinating and fulfilling thing to take a role in a place that means so much to so many people. Please think and pray over the next few weeks about getting involved. *Let it be your Easter Resolution: to participate in some way, no matter how small, in keeping your church the lively and welcoming place it has always been.*

Take this report home with you and, in a quiet moment, from time to time, please read the following prayer to yourself:

My church is composed of people like me - **I help make it what it is.**

It will be friendly - **if I am.**

Its pews will be filled - **if I help fill them.**

It will do great work - **if I work.**

It will make generous gifts - **if I am a generous giver.**

It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship - **if I invite and bring them in.**

It will be a church of love and faith - **if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these same things.**

Therefore, with the help of God, I will dedicate myself to the task of being all the things I want my church to be.

Amen

Finally, once again, Maggie and I thank everyone for their love, support and encouragement over the years. You have done so much for us. You can be sure of our prayers for you as, while from this point on we do not share the same space, we will certainly share this amazing journey together - wherever it is we find ourselves.

May God bless you all as you continue to find ways of following your individual calling as followers of Christ, and finding new ways of participating in the life and worship of his church here at Riverhead with Dunton Green.

Shalom - God bless you

Martin & Maggie.