

Easter 5
9.30 Langham. Holy Communion followed by APCM
Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-15

By virtue of my calling I am given the care of souls in this parish but I couldn't do this if we didn't journey together. The ministry of this church is corporate, it is all of ours. We are all the 'laos', the people of God, and this is irrespective of our age and calling. A sapling, is a tree, a tree, bearing fruit is a tree and a mature tree is still a tree. In the same way that a tree is a tree regardless of its age. We are all members of the church, regardless of our age, and we are, therefore all part of the body of Christ, and all essential to its good working and health. We journey together as we grow the Kingdom of God and point others to Jesus.

First I would like to thank-you all, for your part in making this body function, and not just function, but function smoothly and efficiently. And I would like to thank Paul who makes it possible for me to be part of this body.

I'd also like to thank a great many of you ... thanks particularly go to Clifford, Laura, Jos and Graham as our Churchwardens. Thanks must also go to Denise who has been the PCC Secretary for the past year, but who is standing down from this role and is going to be replaced by Gemma Smith. Thank-you for offering your services, Gemma. We are very grateful. Thank-you to Stephen who has drawn our Annual Report together this year, your work in this direction is much appreciated.

Thank-you to Jasper who has been our PCC Treasurer for a number of years and who has asked to stand down. As we haven't been able to find a replacement, Jasper has offered to continue on a meeting-by-meeting basis but the need to find his replacement is urgent. Please pray about this and ask those whom you know, if they would be prepared to take on this role.

After many years, Ian is standing down as the Newsletter Editor, we are very grateful to him for all the work he has done on our behalf and our thanks go to Charlotte Parker who has offered to take on this mantle. I also want to thank Scott for his work relating to the advertisements in the Newsletter over the last year. We are sorry he has stepped down from this post and wish him well in the coming year. We have also said farewell to Claire who is stepping down as PCC Member and Deputy-Churchwarden.

I would also like to thank Brian Flack, and Graham, who quietly behind the scenes make it possible for our buildings remain in good order, so that we can worship in comfort.

Thanks go to Denise Hobday for all of her work as our Reader; to Mark our organist; those who care for our children and young people Patsy Ann, Dominic, Rebecca, James and all those who support Sunday Group; thanks to all those who offer hospitality and provide food and all of the coffee after services; thanks to you who pray for our parish and the wider world; thanks to those who have decorated our churches so beautifully, not only for our festivals but also faithfully on a week-by-week basis, Dot and Annette, and the teams in both churches; there are many more who work tirelessly for our churches ... thank-you all, too many to name, for your time and commitment. You are all very much appreciated.

Much has been undertaken, and much accomplished, during the past year, perhaps the largest pieces of work were the Church and Village Surveys. These showed some needs which led to some actions being taken...

- The irregular times of the services were not helpful, so we now meet at 9.30 every Sunday.
- The service on the first Sunday is now lead by the Reverend Carol Mitson, to whom I am indebted
- The monthly 8 am service at St. Mary's is now from the Book of Common Prayer, rather than being Order Two, of Common Worship
- Monthly, BCP Evensong at St. Peter's is held at 4.30 during 'Winter time' and 6 pm during 'Summer Time'
- Large print copies of the BCP books have been purchased for both churches
- To facilitate these changes in our services we have adopted a two month rolling pattern
- The 9.30 services on the third Sunday of each month are no longer Eucharistic and are now Morning Praise, or Baptismal, services. A team now meets regularly to plan these services. I believe that they have been a great step forward and that they are becoming a blessing to many
- In response to the survey, Sunday Group is available every week except third Sundays – we will be trying to maintain this through the school holidays as well
- Thanks go to the team who are working on raising the profile of our finances in the parish
- To take on the administration necessary for our three parishes it was agreed to have an administrator in common with Great Horkeley and West Bergholt, working in the West Bergholt vestry. Liz Dixon has been appointed to this role and is taking on a great deal of the administrative work of the three parishes, including keeping the websites and social media sites up-to-date and informed.

During the year, The Zone and The Edge have moved from Patsy Ann's home to the Methodist Chapel hall in Boxted. The Sheils Family are running both of these ventures and numbers are slowly growing.

During the year we also looked at the Diocesan initiative of 'Serving With Accountability'. After discussion, the PCC decided to concentrate on making our worship the central focus of the life of the church, and that the church community should seek to be a blessing to the community which we serve. Through this we hope to witness to God's justice, mercy and peace. And in this context I would like to give thanks go to David Hope and everyone who volunteers to make Good Neighbours the efficient and generous-hearted organisation that it is. I would also like to affirm the starting up of The Drop-In Café in Boxted Village Hall on Friday mornings, during term time. Thank-you Carola for spear heading this initiative and the team which makes it possible.

A Fellowship Group has started to meet fortnightly in the home of Don and Carola Markham. We have studied the Book of Ephesians and have looked at various topics.

A Three Parishes Prayer Breakfast was held in Boxted, as part of a Colchester Deanery initiative. It was well supported by this parish and it was a blessing to all who attended. Following on from this it is hoped to set up regular 'Men's Breakfasts' in the three parishes, this year.

Following the survey we have a single Three Parishes Service on fifth Sundays in a month which is followed by coffee, or a light meal together. The Dean of Chelmsford Cathedral, the

Canon Theologian of the cathedral and Bishop Roger, will be at the services in the coming year.

During the year several children have been baptised and we had several weddings. Confirmation courses were held for both Young People and Adults, and Amelia Benns was confirmed following the course ... this is something to celebrate!

In October there was a Three PCC's Away Day at Assington Hall, led by myself and Rev. Geoff Read. Thanks go to him. It was a great success, helping us to have some Holy Conversations about our parish and the relationship between ourselves, and Great Horkesley and West Bergholt. The day helped us to build bridges between the three parishes and started to help us to see how we might journey onwards together.

In addition to this, in the coming year, we will be exploring how we may best journey with our neighbouring parishes of Myland, Little Horkesley, Wormingford, Mount Bures and St. Luke's as we become the Mission and Ministry Unit (MMU) for North Colchester.

One last thing I would like to celebrate is our relationship with St. Peter's School, Boxted and with Langham School. Our relationship with both schools has deepened during the past year, and planning, by the children of the Faith Garden at St. Peter's is testament to this. We welcome Mrs. Laura Khine as the new Headteacher of St. Peter's. It's great that the children are now taking the lead in planning and leading services in school and in church.

I think that these thoughts illuminate much of the journey Langham with Boxted has made this year, and will make in the year to come.

So, looking forward to the coming year ... there are some things in the pipeline and some questions to ask ourselves.

- We are looking to make the church increasingly family-friendly and to increasingly outreach to families in the villages
- We are looking at ways we can learn more about and increase our individual, and corporate, discipleship
 - As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance; baptism without church discipline; Communion without confession ..."
 - Discipline is necessary and Christ-like for us all
- We are looking to deepen the prayer-life of our parish, and will be looking at the possibility of offering prayer after services for those who request it
- We are looking at how we can discern and train the leaders of the future from within our midst
 - In particular young leaders
- I would like to set up Baptism and Funeral Teams in the parish, and to this end there are training days at St. John's, Ipswich Road, 20th June and 4th May respectively
- I yearn that we make our work amongst children more about encountering God, than about being how much they learn
 - Have we been spiritual gardeners for the children of this church this year, or weed killer?
- There will be another PCC Away Day in October this year, and perhaps a three parishes weekend away in 2/3 years' time

So, many hopes and aspirations for the parish in the coming year!

Questions we can be asking ourselves include

- How have we grown spiritually during the last year?
- Have we had a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ this year, or not?
- Are we pilgrims or empty vessels?
- How confident are we in our growth in maturity and numbers in the coming year?

And as we ask these questions, let us pray for the coming year in the life of this parish.

When Justin Welby was being licensed as the Archbishop of Canterbury, he was asked at the door of Canterbury Cathedral, “Who are you and why do you request entry?” He answered, “I am Justin, a servant of Jesus Christ, and I come as one seeking the grace of God to travel with you in His service together.” This is my prayer today, “I am a servant of Jesus Christ, and I come as one seeking the grace of God to travel with you in His service together and I pray that this will be our journey in the coming year”. Amen.