

St Michael's APCM, 26 May 2024

Vicar's Report - a Preliminary Message

Dear Parishioners,

I plan to give a verbal message at our APCM on 26 May, once we've all had opportunity to read and reflect on the various papers currently being compiled for our meeting.

In the mean-time I'd like to share some first thoughts about what has been good, or new, encouraging or challenging over the course of the past 12 months. I may have more to say on these matters, after further reflection, when we meet.

It's been a joy to me to see church life and worship continue to grow, develop, recover and restore, after the testing times since the 2020-Lockdowns, and my own tribulations in 2022-23. The rousing, jubilant and well-attended Communion this Easter Day was a particularly encouraging service, to me, and I know to others too.

In 2023 we had a good number of Confirmation candidates (17) come forward, for presentation at a number of services around the diocese, with one at St Michael's. Again, a great encouragement to see Christians older and younger, newer and more established, taking the opportunity to confess their faith publicly, and pray for strengthening in his Holy Spirit.

St Michael's is a living, growing church, to which new worshipers frequently gravitate. It's been good to welcome a number into our regular church community this year. Equally, we've noted the absence of a number of our long-time friends in the past twelve months - due to frailty, relocation, illness or death. We face a challenge and opportunity to nurture our new brothers and sisters into sharing our ministry, service and giving, to continually sustain the life and work of our church.

One area where we try to do this is in outreach to our children and young people. It's been good to welcome new young voices into the leading of worship at the First Sunday Service of the Word. And great to have a Trebles' section of the choir re-established, after its abeyance since the pandemic. The contribution of our younger members to worship, song and word is a great encouragement, as is the lively hum that comes Sunday by Sunday from the Lady Chapel, as Godly Play sessions buzz into life.

A challenge we are living through is the context of our national culture - and the response of the church within it. We've had debates in PCC about the Church of England's decision to introduce 'Prayers of Love and Faith', for the blessing of people in same-sex relationships. It's my view that in a society which drifts further and further from its historical Christian moorings, the Church needs to prize, retain and affirm its God-revealed beliefs and values, rather than diluting or abandoning them. I'm grateful for affirmation and support received from parishioners for holding this perspective.

St Michael's is a building with a special place and stature in our town, and it's been good to en flesh that history in worship recently: including a joyful Civic Service last autumn, and another RBL service forthcoming as I write. Also on the horizon is an opportunity to partner with neighbours building community in Stortford Fields, through which we hope to raise awareness of what is also *their* Parish Church.

Much more constitutes our life than I can mention on a single sheet. Thank you for every act of faith, prayer, love and service which we all offer together as Christ's body here. But let me honour the perseverance and efforts of Claire, Gill, and our whole Wardens' Team, plus many co-workers. Especially in dealing with the QI work and Lightning Strike repairs. We have a building in decent order and with functioning electrics! May God's Holy Spirit continually fill it with His light, energy and life. *Derwyn Williams, Vicar, May 2024.*