

Rector's Annual Report 2023

As you are all aware this Report will be my last to the Benefice here and that after seven years here we will be moving on. These times of transition are never easy, practically or emotionally. And even when we can see a way forward uncertainty can knock us off course or stop us in our tracks. This isn't helped by the Church's archane ways of doing things. A number of people have asked me who I'll be handing over to! They are astounded when I try to explain the process and that it will take at least six months, maybe a year, or longer (like last time).

Looking at the bigger picture, something has to change, particularly as now both parishes have fallen woefully short on their Parish Share payments. Therefore, the appointment of another Minister on a Stipendiary basis is unlikely. However, in time, someone may be appointed on a 'House for Duty' basis: The house is provided and all the bills covered, but no stipend is paid. Such arrangements are aimed at enticing the newly retired, who can live off their pension and continue in the role of 'Vicar'. Alternatively, our Benefice may be attached to another Benefice, or perhaps split, with Kilsby going with Crick and Barby with Braunston. That might not take so long. But caution please, in the words of Manuel, 'I know nothing'. It is only my speculation.

During that process (the 'Interregnum'), responsibility for each Church rests on the Churchwardens, so now, more than ever, my plea is that there be two Churchwardens for each Parish. I do hope you are not going into this process with just one Churchwarden having responsibility for both churches? The Rural Dean, Stephen Burrows, will have oversight of the situation, so that together with the Churchwardens (I use the plural optimistically) all services will be covered. There are two or three Priests with 'Permission to Officiate' (POT) in the Deanery, who will hopefully be available to lead our Holy Communion services. Reverend Liz and Reverend Kit may be able to commit to some of these too. So, we can be optimistic that the show can be kept on the road! Hopefully, by the time I leave - which isn't until the end of April - there will be a little bit of clarity about the short-term arrangements and the long-term possibilities.

That's all to come. Looking back over the last twelve months are there signs of encouragement? Yes!

- The Lay led services at Barby have continued, largely thanks to the commitment of Bart; who is now well into training to become a Reader.
- Attendance at Barby is nearing preCovid levels at both the Lay led 'Morning Worship' and Holy Communion services.
- At Kilsby the Lay led services have been dropped for the time being, but the weeks where there is a Communion service have seen numbers rise to double figures, despite the cold, and the lack of an organist or choir.
- The 'Teddy Bears' at St Mary's have been very popular, and knitters, no doubt, are feverishly clashing needles to produce some more as I speak.

- The associated 'Picnics' (in church) are attracting young children, parents, and of course their Bears.
- Relationships with both schools have been strengthened and at least termly visits to church for services re-established.
- Soup and a Roll continues to be a major monthly attraction at Barby.
- Both church buildings are being well maintained, if at significant cost, and the next phase of the 'Taps and Toilet' project is gaining traction at St Mary's.

None of this happens by magic, but is thanks to the (too) few who, galvanized by the Holy Spirit, give their time and energy to the mundane and creative aspects of church life. A big 'thank you' to all of you.

So, what's next? The first task for our PCCs is to construct a 'Parish Profile' that clarifies the situation of the Benefice. This will form the 'Statement of Need' necessary to appoint a new minister. A Section 11 Meeting will be held by the Rural Dean with the Churchwardens to roadmap the process. This will lead to a Section 12 Meeting with the Archdeacon (Richard Ormston) - or maybe Bishop John, or the new Diocesan Bishop when appointed - to further the process, advertising the vacancy and preparing for interviews.

As indicated above, some of this may be circumvented by the Benefice or Parishes being added to other existing Benefices.

Most important of all is, naturally, prayer. This will undoubtedly allay concerns and help you negotiate the way forward.

*'Merciful Lord, you know our struggle to serve you:
when sin spoils our lives and overshadows our hearts,
come to our aid and turn us back to you again;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.'*

Finally, Mary and I would like to thank you all for giving us the opportunity to journey with you these last few years. It has not been easy for any of us and at many points we would have preferred a different outcome. However, that has been the bit of the road we have travelled, and we have done so together in harmony with the Lord of our hearts. His Light still burns and always will.

- Rev Nigel Fry, 12th March 2023

*'May you have the wisdom to read time clearly
And know when the seed of change will flourish.'*
(John O'Donohue - 'To Bless the Space Between Us')