

## Vicar's Review of 2023

The first thing I must do is thank Elizabeth for the comprehensive Trustees Report which gives a far more detailed and extensive review of 2022 activities than I can hope to offer. The main danger I face is that I will inadvertently emphasise the wrong features of this rich tapestry.

Rather than repeating its contents line by line, I encourage everyone to read the report carefully, and to reflect on it.

Easter 2022 signalled an upsurge of energy, and the summer brought many enriching activities:

- a long-awaited icon exhibition for the Dulwich Festival Artists' Open House fortnight, which generated a great deal of public interest and many visitors to the church
- a moving fifth anniversary Midnight Grenfell Eucharist, celebrated by bishop Christopher, attended by the local fire-brigade, Helen Hayes MP, a local councillor and ecumenical representatives, at which the choir sang an anthem composed by Ruth for the occasion
- a Spafford Center service and lunch attended by Bishop Christopher, a representative of the Palestinian Mission in London, Center Trustees and their families and members of our congregation
- a joyful and moving L'Arche Story of Creation during a simplified sung Eucharist in July, which had hundreds of YouTube views.

Last summer was stimulating, rewarding, and thought provoking, and was reinforced by initiatives taking us into the autumn. Liz Cleary took over Christian Aid (supported still by David Page) and we had a new Christian Aid Harvest lunch in October. The Love West Dulwich stall in May was echoed by a November relaunch, largely run by Ethan and Moira – ensuring we had a significant local presence.

Robin returned as a Reader. The licensing of Daniel and Eleanor as Readers in October marked a welcome new phase for them and for us, through their preaching, teaching and pastoral ministry, and Ethan continued to develop his role as trainee Pioneer Minister, with initiatives on the Peabody Estate and at the Rosendale Pub. Details of these can be found in the Report.

Meanwhile our dedicated team of children and youth leaders, ably coordinated by Moira, provided a continual and varied range of activities for young people and their families. The congregational support for school visits, coordinated by Jeremy, was impressive and a vital form of outreach. Becky and her team ensured that smAll Saints continued to flourish.

Our choral music was outstanding, as ever, and there were fitting responses to important civic occasions, often to do with the royal family. Ruth has ensured

an inspirational week by week ministry of music, and the choir – including a growing Junior Choir – always rises to the opportunities and challenges of major festivals. It was wonderful to have full churches for the complete set of Easter, Advent and Christmas services.

Pastoral care has been much in evidence one-to-one, as well as in groups such as Valerie and Sophie's bereavement courses. Sadly, we had some significant funerals. Much-loved members of the congregation died in 2022, adding to a heavy toll of loss which has been ongoing now for several years and has continued into 2023.

Several long-term members of All Saints have experienced increasing disability, and some are now confined to their homes. Initiatives such as Knit and Natter, and Tea, Cake and Poetry provide much-needed opportunities for socializing and friendship for those who can get out: Jan, Norma and others do a fabulous job of enabling people – both congregation members and from the wider community – to meet during the week. The Christmas lunch, organised by Valerie with her team, reached a larger number of people than the previous year, when Covid discouraged attendance.

The weekly support which we offer to adults with learning disabilities – especially to L'Arche residents – is vital and mutually enriching. They teach us what it means to be human. Mutual enrichment is also at the heart of our involvement with our local Foodbank – coordinated by Carl throughout 2022 – and the Robes winter night shelter, run by Amanda at St Luke's, with Elizabeth as the All Saints coordinator. The other main local charity some of us support – 4All – would value more volunteers.

The well-attended Inclusion workshop in October reinforced a commitment to welcoming others and enabling participation – apparent also in the ministry of our welcome team, and the care which Cathy, Steve, Charles, and Eunice put into rotas. If anyone would like to be further involved in church activities, please do speak to those in charge – or if in doubt, to me. Like other churches we face an ongoing challenge to be as inclusive as possible, especially – in our case – in relation to race and class.

There are so many people and so much to be grateful for. We are an active church, and behind the scenes there is much love, care, and labour. Our staff team has worked hard on our behalf, and the PCC, and especially our churchwardens Angie and Julian and our treasurer Ethan, have given unstinting service. We owe them a huge debt of thanks.

But at the very point when we experienced renewed confidence, emerging from Covid, we – along with the rest of the country – were faced with rising energy bills. To avoid a potential *increase* of £60K, we had to get to grips with our energy consumption. To do this, we had to replace the software controlling

our usage. The Report gives more information on this and other costly building expenses we have incurred over the past year. This beautiful building comes with a high price tag, as the systems controlling it begin to fail. The next two-three years will be crucial as we seek to make it fit-for-purpose for the next decade. The financial challenge we face is steep and comes at a time when many long-term members have died or have moved away. We do have some restricted funds to draw upon, but these are not infinite.

Ethan has endured a continuous struggle over the past year to resolve software problems with our previous accounting package, so that the accounts for the past two years can be sent to our Independent Examiner. We have a way forward, and this is covered at another point in the meeting. But it's important this evening to acknowledge how much this has cost him. Thank you, Ethan, for all you have done as treasurer over the past two years.

And so, my Review effectively has two narratives. On the one hand there is a narrative of teamwork, creativity, expansion, and a recovery from Covid. On the other hand, there is a list of worries to do with the building and finance. I have no doubt that this year many other churches will be telling the same two stories.

But we are sustained by prayer. Our worship together deepens our relationship with one another and with God. Thanksgiving for Christ's incarnation, for his sacrifice and death on the cross, his resurrection, and sacramental presence amongst us are at the heart of all we do. As a living Eucharistic community, we are continually called into relationships that are characterized by openness, trust, respect, and care. We are called to see – and to see again – that every person is unique and precious in God's sight. To recognize and give thanks for the blessings we receive. To celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit among us and within us.

At the same time, we are called to be honest about the reality of suffering in our world, and to work for the justice and peace of God's kingdom, and the future of our beautiful but wounded planet.

And so, let us continue to celebrate the privilege and gift of our Christian calling and discipleship, in the words of a prayer by the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld:

For all that has been,  
thanks.  
For all that is to come,  
yes!

With my very best wishes, and thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,

Alan Everett, Vicar.

23 May 2023.