

Rector's Report for the 2010 Annual Meetings

As I am now in my 14th year as Rector of this parish, you might think that I have run out of things to say to you. Not at all! The great joy of Ministry is that each day, week, month, year, has something fresh within it that is worthy of report. As I look back on my diary for last year, I am reminded of the many encounters I had with members of the congregation, local community, deanery, diocese and beyond. The highlights of the year, for me, have been:

- Our Youth Club, Transformers
- My visit to our sponsored orphanages in Romania
- Our planning for the bid to build a Youth Wing

I could be in danger of repeating what or all that has been said in the Annual Report of the Church Council, which is attached to our Annual Accounts. Obviously, I have been fairly closely involved in most, if not all, of what is recorded there. I want to pay tribute to those who daily assist me in the running of the Parish. Every time there is a change of Churchwardens, or membership of the Parochial Church Council, one wonders what that new dynamic is going to be like – how it going to work out. Happily, I am delighted that the 2 wardens, Wendy and Chris, continue to be in the line of worthy holders of that responsible office. Wendy has been closely involved in the finances of the parish, keeping us within our tight budgets, and helping Angela Robinson to fully assume that role this year. Chris has supervised the maintenance of the building, making sure that all necessary work is carried out effectively and smoothly, and obtaining the best-value deals with all our contractors. Both wardens work together on those tasks, freeing me up to do pastoral and mission work.

All members of the PCC work hard at overseeing the management of the parish, and also discussing its mission role. The attendance at meetings is high, and the level of discussion is good, ensuring that all understand their part in the life of the parish, and also their responsibilities as trustees of the assets of the parish. From this year, we have become a Registered Charity, and their roles and responsibilities are more sharply defined. I am grateful to them all for their contribution. Within the business of the Church Council, we have always tried to keep the Church's mission at the forefront of our minds when making decisions.

A lot of people work behind the scenes; a lot of things happen behind the scenes. When someone is invited to a meal in your home, you will spend a good deal of time ensuring that the house is clean, warm, tidy; that the meal is prepared; that your welcome is extended to all. When has guests from outside the family circle, I know from personal experience that even more fuss is made, and the preparations more exact. The Church family, when it invites people to its home and meal every day, goes through the same rigors of preparation, execution, analysis. What do we need to do? What prayers shall we have? What music or hymns should there be? Do we have enough chairs, tables, linen?

I wish to record here my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all who help 'behind the scenes' and in a visibly obvious way; without you we will be lost! We are always keen to involve more people from the congregation in the life of the church and parish, so if you feel you can help, then please speak to one of the Wardens.

Our Children's and Youth ministry is a real success. Following Sue Lambert's Licensing as a Reader last September, I asked her to take on the role of Children's Minister in the parish, recognising her gifts in that sphere. She, and the other Sunday School leaders, are very talented at delivering the message of God to the children in the Sunday School. The attendance is spasmodic, which makes it difficult to plan their work; the irony is that the lowest number of children come when there is a Children's Mass. We obviously need to listen to what the children are saying with that action, and to deliver something newer and fresher. We are currently exploring having a sort of Kids Club on a Saturday, with craft, stories, acting, the modern way of delivery.

Simon Dando and his team of volunteers run a very busy and successful youth club on a Wednesday night in the church hall. 'Transformers' has become a venue fixed in young people's diaries, and is delivering a vital resource to local young people. They are lively, they are noisy, they get into trouble, they enjoy themselves: they are young people, and we welcome them, nurture them, care for them. With the possibility of a Saturday activity widening our outreach to them, the hope is that they might feel the wish to worship with us on a Sunday.

The prospect of a Youth Wing – 'The Loft' – moves along, and we are not rushing any decision until we know what young people want, what we can build, and what we can afford. We hope to have a purpose-built unit, open from 8am until 10pm, catering for young people, their families and the whole community. At the same time, we will want to bring the present church hall up to date in terms of utilities provision, using modern, eco-friendly methods of heating and lighting. As well as striving for excellence in our build, we seek to be Green, in line with modern trends, reminding us of the scarcity and value of God's resources and our guardianship and stewardship of them. All this will need funding, and we will fully cost out the venture and apply to the appropriate public bodies and charities, praying for a generous response.

Generosity is one of our hallmarks, and people in this parish are both that and sacrificial in their giving to the daily life of the church, and to the charities we support as a parish. I was thrilled to have been invited to go with Fr Martin Lane to visit the orphanages we support in Romania. I went in December, when it was mild. If I had left it until January or later, I would have been colder! Last year, we raised £430, which paid for the children's school books. I was able to meet the children whom I had only known through photographs, and the staff, who are truly devoted to the wellbeing of those in their care. I also had other funding (from Gosport Rotary Club), so I was also able to buy them a new cooker, sewing machines, etc, things which we all take for granted, and which are beyond their purse.

The country is in a Recession, and so is the diocese and the parish; we were unable to pay our Parish Share to the diocese of £19,770 last year, because of the huge call on our income. Every penny we spend is accounted for, and our huge income (just over £100,000) is spent as soon it comes in. We always have to pay out to ensure that the building is watertight, warm, clean, things we all do at home. But I am paid from a central pot to which all parishes contribute, and our Parish Share is less than half the true cost of one priest. Speaking as your Area Dean, I am keen to address this urgently. Sacrifice and Generosity continues to be called for, and I know that you will respond carefully and prayerfully to this urgent need, as you always have in the past.

I would like to pay tribute to Fr Brian Williams, who underpins my ministry in many practical ways, by taking services when I am unavailable because of duties outside the parish, and to ensure that I take a day off during the week. He is a priceless gem! The Bishop appointed me as Area Dean of Gosport from September, just before he retired! These added responsibilities, with the wonderful privilege of serving a wider community, are only made possible with Brian's willing help. Other office-holders, such as David Savage (the Administrator) and Graham Brindley (the Verger) ensure that their side of things runs smoothly.

When Sid Sole retired at Christmas as Organist & Choirmaster for 15 years, he was thanked for his commitment to that role, and for his sacrifice for the church. We need to pray earnestly for a replacement for him. I mentioned Sue Lambert earlier, but I must not forget Peter Lambert, who was recommended for training for the Sacred Ministry. He is now into a 3-year course, and we look forward to seeing him ordained in 2012. We were thrilled to see our former Pastoral Assistant, Judith Swaine, ordained in the summer; we still miss her. God continues to call people to serve Him, and we must be thankful for that, and consider our own response to that Call.

Running a parish is a team effort. So, Thank You to all who do that, and Thank You to all our parishioners, who present such wonderful opportunities for ministry, with the joys and the challenges that it all brings. Without Christ in the forefront of our lives, we are nothing. This prayer wonderfully and powerfully sums it all up:

Remember, O Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love. Enlarge its borders through the preaching of the everlasting gospel, and gather the faithful from all the ends of the earth into the kingdom which thou hast prepared. For thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.ⁱ

May God bless you and keep you.

Fr John Draper

ⁱ Adapted from 'The Didache', and Early Church collection of teachings.