

Rector's report to Toddington APCM for the year 2022.

Rev Linda Washington – Wednesday 24 May 2023

2022 was a year of emerging from Covid restrictions to fuller freedom of worship, returning to regular Sunday morning services, glad to be able to gather freely again. Singing returned (without masks) and we welcomed back organists to lead our worship. Thank you Roger, Bob and Cliff for accompanying our services and for choosing the hymns.

Covid still bears its mark. We no longer share the Peace with a handshake – continuing instead with the covid adopted practice of sharing a friendly wave to each other from our pews and we still prefer not to share the common Communion Cup, receiving instead a wafer dipped into consecrated wine by the priest, and we continue to hand sanitise.

Happily, our Sunday morning congregation numbers have gradually grown with most members returning and it has been a delight to welcome some new members. There have been wonderful times of weddings, confirmations and baptisms with people able to gather without restriction on numbers.

Christmas services were well attended this year and we were delighted to welcome a fuller congregation for the crib service, Midnight Mass and the Carol services. Parkfields school visited for their school Christmas service for the first time since I have been the minister here and their newly formed choir sang beautifully. Sadly, the lower school's Christmas service at church was hit by the bad weather – too dangerously icy for the children to walk down, so I went up to school instead. This was the first year since Covid when people returned to church, without anxiety, to celebrate Jesus' birth keen to sing out to carols again.

On Remembrance Sunday, the village service was well attended and we have been pleased to receive support from John, Pippa and other Royal British Legion members for different church events during the year, and to work with them.

The annual In Loving Memory service at Toddington church was well attended with people glad to come to light a candle and to remember loved ones who have died – it reflected also, the times of Covid when people were not able to say farewell to loved ones in the way that they would have liked.

There have been national times of celebration and of sadness. In the Summer we celebrated the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II with a benefice service. The country was glad to party and gather, to celebrate and mark the special occasion with street parties and community events. Sadly, in early September, the Queen died, and the country was thrown into a period of mourning and grief saddened by the loss of such a wonderful, dedicated, and committed, model of service and leadership, which we are unlikely to ever see again. Queen Elizabeth was such a wisely discerning and caring Christian example and witness. Someone I, and many others, looked to with great respect.

The churches were open for prayer and for people to sign the book of Commemoration. On 18 September, two different benefice services were held: one to licence me as Rector, and the other to Commemorate and give thanks for the life of the Queen. The Archdeacon attended each service and was visibly surprised to see a long queue of people lining up outside Toddington Church, waiting to enter to give thanks and pray for the Queen on the eve of the State Funeral. Public grief was tangible.

On 25 September Chalgrave and Toddington churches both celebrated Harvest services and joined together afterwards for Harvest lunch. It was a delight to see this church so beautifully decorated for the Harvest, In Loving Memory, Easter, the celebration services, and for the Christmas services in December. Thank you to all who contributed to the beautiful decorations.

The Church celebrated its 800 year anniversary in 2022. Thank you all for your generosity of enthusiasm, support and of donations during the year. 2022 was also a memorable year, because the church was fully able to pay

its Parish Share, without Diocesan help, for the first time. When I arrived in 2017 the church had been unable to meet the Parish Share for some years. We have faithfully and dedicatedly worked hard, under Alan's budget guidance and under Dee's amazing fundraising inspiration and organisation, with the aim to be able to pay our way.. and we have, thanks to you all.

The Petal and Purl festival was a social highlight of the year, held in September., it involved so many willing helpers and knitters, keen to share Angela and Rita's vision for a creative knitting and floral display to mark the church over 800 years. It was wonderful. Thank you so much to all involved. The church looked so beautiful.

After two years of lockdown and restriction people were glad to emerge to joyful events, but other worldly events have taken their toll. Ministry has involved pastoral care for heightened anxieties on things which were not on our radar previously: the War in Ukraine, Climate change and its effects, political and economic stresses. All have reaped an affect. Families have less money to spend due to rising inflation and high heating costs and for many, there is an anxiety which was not there before Covid. The church has been able again this year to donate Christmas hampers to certain families in need, guided by the schools and we issued bags to about 7 families.

There is a deep love and dedication of service to this beautiful church. Folks have worked incredibly hard during 2022 to fundraise, to provide additional social events sensitive to people's sense of loneliness and lack of confidence about gathering in public places etc. Dee has thoughtfully introduced additional times of fellowship with Wednesday Winter Warmer sessions etc to enable people to just be together somewhere warm; bearing in mind the high cost of fuel at home this year. Coffee morning and Ploughman's events have returned, Messy Church continues to thrive, Youth group has continued for 9-13 years, Knitting and Painting for Pleasure group and seated Pilates are just some of the activity groups meeting in the

church hall. All these events are only possible because of the wonderfully supportive team of volunteers and helpers. Thankyou!

Sadly, Rita Stares, John Bryant died in 2022 and their loss has been significant. Their support and fellowship was much valued and they are sadly missed. Iain, Jess and Archie sadly left us at the end of the year. They had become much loved members of the church family and we wish Iain every blessing in his new placement in Dunstable, to continue his ordination training.

Church members have continued to provide wonderful refreshments. The team may be limited in numbers, but they work so hard and well together. Thank you to all who offer help in any way whether it is in catering, preparing crafts for Messy Church, gardening, taking boxes of items to the charity shops, donating foods for foodbank, cleaning the church, resourcing activities, arranging flowers, sweeping, polishing, counting monies or doing one of the multiple tasks I have omitted. I cannot thank enough Dee, Church warden, Malcolm, Reader and Dee's right hand man, Helen – PCC secretary, and Safeguarding officer, all the PCC, the Friends of St George's, Alan the Treasurer, Peter who organises the bell ringing teams and John Pask who has climbed the tower on so many occasions over the years, to raise the standard, correct the clock or to ring the bells. Thank you to all of you who help in any way to keep the church running, clean, tidy, welcoming and in good condition for the generations to come.

I continue in my role as an ex-officio Governor at the lower School, working with the Governing board, with the new Headteacher Mrs Lamb who worked incredibly hard with her staff to improve provision and education for pupils, preparing for the new Ofsted goals and standards. They were rewarded in 2023 with a 'Good' inspection. Sadly, Mrs Lamb is moving on to take up the role of Director for School Improvement within the Academy trust, and a new Headteacher commences in September 2023.

Messy Church continues monthly, held at Wilkinson Hall. A team of volunteers offer craft activities, Bible story and tea, for about 20 children who attend with their parents. Youth group, 9-13 years, continues monthly

led by Rebecca Caird and a small team of volunteers. There have been some wonderful times of discussion and reflection alongside times of activity and games. Looking ahead, it would be good to offer facility for the older children 13+ years.

Our mission action goals continue to focus on outreach, social and fundraising opportunities, keen to develop links within the parish community. We have had one or two training courses and look to develop prayer and home group opportunities.

All that happens at church would not be possible without the help and support of the wonderful team... the body of Christ in action!

I offer special thanks to Nigel and Malcolm who assist and support me in leading services, to Bishop Richard and Archdeacon Dave who have supported special services, and to Nicholas and the Quintet choir for the beautiful music and special times of worship.

May the Lord lead us, refresh and fill us with His power, his light and his love, that we may continue to serve Him and his people with energy and joy. May the people and businesses in this parish be blessed and know the love of God. God bless you all. Thank you for being such a wonderful team.