

ST THOMAS OLD CHARLTON APCM MAY 2024

RECTOR'S REPORT FOR 2023



THANKS

Churches are amazing organisations. They only exist, live and develop because of the contributions of people who give, expecting nothing in return. Some of those people worship here. Others don't, but they want to help and they want to give. St Thomas is alive because of the people who give: time, skills, energy, resources, money, presence and prayer. We encourage one another to give what we can in gratitude for all God has done for us. That is generous giving.

So thank you to people who read, pray, carry the cross, set up the altar, lead worship, teach, tend the garden, carry out odd jobs, sit on committees, look after money, open and close the church, move furniture, feed and water us, smile, make decisions, ask questions, have ideas, deal with bookings, play music, sing, welcome, invite, keep in touch, visit the sick and frail, promote, publicise and communicate, listen and care, clean and tidy, stream services, manage IT, link with schools, welcome, nurture and engage children, donate items, give money, raise money, offer hospitality, represent the church locally, make our church safe, take care of the building, keep records, run meetings. What have I left out?

Thanks to you all.

HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of the year?

Opening of the beautiful garden of reflection, by the deputy mayor in July and winning the Greenwich In Bloom runner up prize. Welcoming 900 children from local schools to take part in the Easter journey, the Christmas Journey and many other curriculum based sessions at church; Admission of Orchantae, Kenya, Maiker and Ngadho to first communion by Archdeacon Alastair on St

Luke's day; Care home services getting onto a strong footing with attendances growing; Launch of children's church and their feedback brightening up the notices; All Age worship taking root and growing; finishing the year with our financial heads above water, and over £36,00 in the bank; securing grants to get the roof and masonry fixed – and (finally!!) coming near to engaging contractors to make it happen; celebrating with Miriam as she completed the Bishop's Certificate; concerts and singalongs bringing in lots of local people; Akic and his 4 children being baptized on Easter Sunday; adopting Prayers of Love and Faith to affirm same sex relationships; employing Sarah, Benefice Administrator whose efficiency and enthusiasm have added so much; Sundays where we dig deeper into God's call for justice and recommit ourselves to working for it; the weekly dedication that continues livestreaming of our services to an amazingly high standard (thanks Arek and Ali); watching Patricia grow in confidence as she continues her training towards commissioning as a children and young people's worker; working with St Mary's Leigh to get preloved school uniform to countless families in the benefice and designer clothes to Ukrainian refugee children; the generous response second year running from congregation members in buying vouchers to brighten up Ukrainian families' Christmases; financial support from the diocese in helping us forward our mission priorities – discipleship, connection and witness; Sheila's legendary raffles; the All Souls fair, buzzing with life and the connections being made; Kinga's beautiful installations to help us celebrate the birth and the resurrection of Jesus and share his story with neighbours,

ONE WORLD

We must never lose sight of the gift that church is to the world. I don't need to name the long list of things happening in the world, our country, our community that are distressing, worrying, alarming. Church is a place where we may seek respite, comfort, rest, refreshment, peace and hope. But it shouldn't become a place where we seek to escape the world or cut ourselves off from it. The pattern of the eucharist is to gather, to be forgiven and fed. But then we're sent out to join in with what God's doing in the world.

We mustn't lose sight of the gift that the gospel is to the human race. And if the world can feel more messed up than it's ever been, our faith is needed more than ever. I hope we can encourage one another to be people who believe the GOOD NEWS, live it and share it. Because we are one neighbourhood, one nation, one world and one human family. St Thomas should never be an island to escape the world. But a place where we realise again that God asks us to care for and about the whole world.

AHEAD

What's down the line? At the moment, St Thomas parish, the area God has given us to love and serve, is tiny. All the housing in the east of the parish demolished. But along Woolwich Road tall blocks are growing up fast. By 2027 the wasteland will be filled with housing, and a new community living in over 900 homes will be on our doorstep. New neighbours will be in our midst. What a fantastic opportunity we'll have to welcome, serve, invite, listen, co-operate with and love a few thousand people we've not met yet. To let them know this is their church. The developers build houses, but they don't build community – that's our job. And out of community can come church that meets people where they are. And grows out of where they are. The timing is great. Because at the end of June, Owen Morgan will be ordained and will join the benefice as our full time pioneer curate. Pioneers spend at least half their time with people who aren't church members. He'll be perfectly positioned to help us welcome new residents, listen to find out how we can love and serve them and gently encourage them towards Jesus.

We've struggled to use our building as much as was happening before covid. We have so much space to share, where so many good things could be happening. Sharing is a way we can serve. It's also a way we can generate money. It's not through lack of trying. But it feels like we may be turning a corner. I believe the months to come will see new things happening inside these walls that fit with our mission and enhance the lives of many. Watch this space.

At the 2019 APCM I remember noting that our average Sunday congregation had grown to 32. In the big scheme of things that's not a big congregation. But we had grown. We were going in the right direction. Then came covid that shook so many things up. It's been hard to get back. In God's creation some plants are small and some large – that's part of biodiversity. It's part of God's love for variety and difference. So I don't think we should assume St Thomas is called to be a megachurch and is failing in its calling. But we are called to nurture, notice, welcome, care, include and to trust in God. If we do that, then we will grow, in depth of faith and in service. I'm sure we hope to grow in numbers too, but let's leave that to God. Let's not be an anxious church, but a joyful one. No matter what our size.

As well as being joyful I hope we can also be a church that adapts to change. Charlton benefice is 2 parishes and 3 church buildings, each placed in a different area and each with their own character and particular space. In the months ahead I think it's important that we look together at how we can complement one another, with the intention that all our churches should thrive, all serve the people God's given us to love and all develop ways to connect with people who don't choose traditional church. I hope we can work across the benefice to become 3 churches that do traditional church well and grow different ways of being church too. So God's good news reaches more people in Charlton than ever before.

SAYING GOODBYE

We've said goodbye several times in the last year. To Vilma Snell, who died in January and whose presence alongside Janet and Wally we'll always miss. May she rest in peace and rise in glory. To Edna Ward resident of Time Court, who died just short of her 101st birthday, and to Karowei, the charismatic bishop of Woolwich, always an encourager of others. And to Viscount Shane Gough, Patron of the Benefice. We've said goodbye as well to our curate Adelaide, who had to withdraw for personal reasons. May she find healing and new beginnings. To Ally Warder, who made the

difficult decision to move on – may she grow and flourish in all that lies ahead. These departures remind us that we're always in the midst of change and that each of us is only here for a season. But while partings bring sadness, we also trust in a God who makes all things new. And who uses what we give during our season, to grow the kingdom that will be forever.

It's the biggest privilege of my life to be Rector of Charlton. I look forward with excitement to the year ahead and to all that God has in store for this church.

Liz Newman
Rector

