

# St. Mary's Parish Church with the Seckford Chapel Woodbridge

## Chairman's Annual Report 2019

I believe Jesus rose from the dead; and therefore I believe in the Easter story. I have no means of proof other than a faith which seems to grant me a sense of authenticity in believing. The question is: does believing really work; is there evidence of truth in the mind and actions that are born of that faith? Can I make the story my own?

If I can, then a new combination is created within me and the story of Easter finds a new expression and reality in my life. Lots of things then happen. I begin to have faith in myself, to find hope in the struggles of others, and ultimately to connect with the truth of the God story. I hope it might be your story too?

Rector: Outlook April 2019

I believe in the Easter Story, and therefore I believe Jesus rose from the dead. I have changed the sentence around from Outlook. It makes more sense this way round because I don't have the rest of the article to support the other way round. I begin here because if it weren't for my understanding of the Easter story, and my commitment to making it my own, then I wouldn't be involved in church at all, at least not in the conventional sense. Do you have to go to church to be a Christian? In my view: no! Christians need each other in order to express their commitment through their brotherhood, given by a common focus on God as Father, and the desire of Jesus that we live together as a family. But we don't need a church building in which to express that, and arguably we don't need the institution either. Both bring order and stability and security to our life: are useful, but not essential.

So my first priority is always people not building. But I will now recognise the enormous value that I place on the work and commitment of The Friends. Their unstinting support and sheer hard work have given us the thousands with which we can now safely move on; renovate and restore the bell ringing mechanism and attack the Quinquennial Report once more. It was a privilege to be invited to address their Annual General Meeting and to give a very personal response to the question 'What does our church mean to me?' To everyone involved in The Friends: thank you.

Visitors are always impressed by the inside of the building. Light, airy and full of prayer would seem to be the overall theme of the remarks in the visitor's book. Yes, people pick up the energies of the past. They feel the presence of something or someone, without necessarily knowing what, but they feel safe and comfortable.

The liturgy is where the energies of the present are expressed by us, and given shape and form. We leave our mark on the building, and the stone absorbs the agonies and the joys of the present day. The cry of the baby at the font, the eye of love in bride and groom, and the pain of grief all find their home in our home, and the transformation of love into new life is made visible every time we break bread together.

This works because you make it work: retired clergy and retired Reader, Elder, churchwarden, music maker, server, sidesman, bell-ringer, flower lady, dusterer, hooverer, and verger. Then there is the parish office, the shop, the Church Centre, in all your different ways you make it happen. And we formally take out our life into the outside world. Here we rely on all our groups as identified in the Report, and recognise the gift of laughter and healing through our hands, and the friend who cares.

So much goes on: thank you. The Dean commented on the energy he could feel when he visited us. This is a warm, comfortable, family and friendly place he said, both building and people. What an accolade to you all.

The energies to which he and I refer are stimulated by prayer and expressed in love. This is powerfully given shape through Junior Church. Somehow, from nowhere, these young families are making their home with us. They have joined our quest for Jesus and I welcome them in your name. The church of the present and future is taking shape in them. Look at the church last week and this. Young little people bringing big hopes in themselves and maybe what God might be like: exhilarating and wonderful.

Time to Reflect is not a time to be certain, nor is it a time to be arrogant in faith with all the answers neatly presented. It is a most precious time to think through in complete safety and confidentially with confidence the issues presented by believing. A good book, a place to think, reflect and question has been the source of spiritual growth for some of you and we shall continue to allow Time to Reflect to grow. Thank you to the group of you, who organise and make this possible.

Growing in God is the diocesan initiative designed to support parishes in their understanding of themselves in relation to their mission to proclaim the kingdom. Regardless of that initiative, and indeed of the substantial resources available to each parish, I hope that as individual Christians we can recognise our own need to grow in God. We can use the initiative as a framework, of course, but unless we personally engage with the idea of finding in God our friend, our brother and our saviour then any formal initiative will be bound to fail. My vision for the future is that we will be so absorbed into God that we cannot but help find new ways of reaching out in order to bring in, to enfold and wrap in love.

There is always a danger in applauding one person or group more than another, and in past times I have been guilty of that. I have yet to read this report. A deliberate decision so that I don't go 'can't believe I have forgotten him, her, or them'! But it is essential that on your behalf I express our sincere gratitude, our heartfelt thanks to Mr Michael Booth, who has served the wider community, and us as Reader. His enduring wit and incisive insight in the pulpit has made me smile and laugh. His friendship and loyalty I shall miss. His going from us is a cause of great sadness, but we wish him and Susan well in their new life across the sea.

At some point next year I shall be retiring. Until then we go forward, developing our own story in the light of Jesus, and I pray that we can continue in that light with enthusiasm and determination to be the people of God as he directs. To all of you - thank you, for being there with me and for me.

Reverend Canon Kevan S. McCormack  
Rector  
17/10/19