

St. Edmund and St. Mary Parish Church annual report 2010.

2010 has been a year of consolidating our position as the church at the heart of the village and reaching out to everyone, together with looking to deepen the faith of those who are part of the church family. It has been a time when illness, and the passing on from this world of faithful people, has impacted upon us. It has also been a time when others have stepped forward to take on new positions.

Despite hard economic times that have impacted on many in our community, we have seen the generosity of spirit displayed by those associated with the church. This began with our Christingle service, where generosity was displayed towards The Children's Society. Thanks are due here to the Uniformed Organisations for their support. In February our churchwardens and treasurer spoke at services to indicate the need to increase giving. Though this did not really happen, the Easter Saturday Gift Day saw over £3,000 donated towards church funds. In partnership with the C. of E. Junior School and Fryerning Church, the harvest giving to Harvest for the Hungry and their work in northern Bulgaria was again very impressive, with ninety one boxes of aid sent as part of the three thousand eight hundred and twenty sent from Essex. We ended the year by supporting Operation Christmas Child with their Shoebox appeal, where seventy one boxes were sent from the church. These efforts, together with separate charity initiatives at the school, display our desire to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

The recession clearly impacted on the number of weddings in the year, down to four, together with the number baptisms at fourteen. The latter are often like mini-weddings, with couples using the service as part of a significant family and friends celebration. Often baptism enquiry is a couples' first contact with the church. We hope to then lead them on through EMUs and the EMUs service to engagement with the church on a regular basis. Thanks are due to Sue Cruse and the team who help regularly on Friday mornings. It would be a fair comment to say this approach has had some success, though many parents appear to only desire a baptism service. However, many of the children at the Church School will talk positively about having been baptised at the church. The number of funerals in the church building this year was six. It has always been difficult to encourage the wider community to hold a funeral service in the church if the deceased was not a regular attendee. Both Sue and I have taken many funerals at Fryerning church, where those not seeing themselves as regular worshippers see this as convenient for going on to a burial of a relative. We have also taken services at various local crematorium. However, local funeral directors tell us that increasingly families want services with no religious content or church minister.

During the year a number of significant members of our church community have suffered illness. Of particular note has been Michael Allen, churchwarden for nine years and Gerry Prescott, who has acted as sacristan for many years. We are all very grateful for their time, effort and expertise that they have selflessly given over the years. We have also seen the passing on from this life of a number of people who have worshipped with us for many years. Mention should be made in particular of Pam Forrester, who had over many years worked with our children and been P.C.C, secretary. This reminds us of the need for the church to continually be renewing itself and engaging and involving new people.

The Church of England Junior School is a very significant part of our ministry to the community. Particular thanks are due to all those who serve as governors on behalf of our church. It should be noted that in the OFSTED report the governors effectiveness was noted as good, and the relationship between the Chair and the Head and the Church and the school as outstanding. The school visited for Easter, Leavers and Harvest services in church. In November, after three weeks of teaching through assemblies, the whole school community came for a special communion service for St. Edmund's Day where all the children were blessed.

During the year we have continued with our desire for people to grow in faith. As a congregation we followed the *Everyone Welcome* course and also *The Passion*. As a P.C.C. we spent a day on the Healing ministry prior to the introduction of a monthly Healing service. The weekly Wednesday home group discussing the Sunday sermon and the monthly Seekers group discussing the Bible reading notes enabled faith to be developed. Many people who do not come to seekers also subscribe to the notes, and thanks are due to Marjorie Perring for organising the subscriptions and to those who host the groups. We held a Brentwood Deanery confirmation service in September at which Pippa Veares and Shirley Baker were confirmed following individual tuition.

Ian Cruse has played the organ and piano and chosen the music for our main services, also working with the choir. His commitment and talent could particularly be seen at the service of Nine Lessons and Carols. We are very fortunate to be able to continue having Ian's music ministry. Apart from our mix monthly programme of regular worship, we have had special services for Christingle, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Harvest, Remembrance and Christmas. The Remembrance service was a very large community celebration, with the final part of the service at the memorial to allow participation from those who had been remembering the fallen at the other village churches.

Sue Elliott-Jones has been involved in worship in her role as Reader, leading a monthly service and being part of the team undertaking intercessions. She plays a valuable part in our worshipping community, and we thank her. Thanks are due to all those who read and intercede and also to Sue Prescott, Phyllis Cooper and Marie Davison for their organisation of the Welcome Team, Bible readers and intercessors.

Mark Jobin and Brynne Poole have continued to enthusiastically lead our Sunday Club activities. A wonderful Nativity presentation was undertaken at a main service in December. We are also very grateful for the fact that the Uniformed Organisations encourage their children to come to our monthly Family service, against a local culture of Sundays for children being a time of sport, drama or other non-church activities.

The Church Hall continues to be a valuable resource for the community, used by a number of groups. Marie Davison continues to administer it, for which we are all grateful. Hosting a very successful bereavement course led by Bennetts Funeral Directors enhanced the community use of the hall this year. It is intended to host this *Grief Journey* course again in the future. We also host a monthly bereavement group run by the local Co-op Funeral Directors.

The commitment to Churches Together continues to be strong amongst all the local ministers across the denominations. There were daily services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the weekly Lent course and the Good Friday procession along the High Street and the service at 2 pm. involving all the local ministers. The service on New Year's Eve prior to the fireworks has become part of the established pattern of activities. Local minister met every six weeks during the year at a fraternal and there were the regular committee meetings. During 2010 I was Chair of Churches Together.

The church was actively involved locally in the Deanery, with Martin Taylor, Sue Elliott-Jones and Mark Jobin representing us on Deanery Synod. Thanks are due to them. Martin has also been part of a group reviewing the allocation of the Deanery share. During the year we have had a vacancy and in 2011 the present Synod comes to an end. I have also been a Brentwood Deanery representative on the Diocesan Synod.

The general décor of the church continues to be something that the PCC desire to address. It is anticipated that in 2011 work will be undertaken to renovate the Petre Chapel. Thanks should be given to all those involved with the church flowers, who help give the church a very attractive and appreciated appearance.

Our PCC met on ten occasions during the year and are to be thanked for their dedication and collective wisdom. Martin Taylor continued to act efficiently as our treasurer. Allen Matthews undertook his ninth year as churchwarden. With Michael Allen unable to continue, we were grateful for Richard Hollox taking on the position of churchwarden. Pat Rayner took on the role of PCC Secretary from Richard. Thanks are due to all who have served and do serve on the PCC.

November brought the news that the Revd. Sue Cruse was to move on to be Vicar at Gosfield and Greenstead Green, part of the Halstead Team Ministry. Sue first came to us seven years ago as an ordinand on an extended placement in the final year of her training. We have all seen Sue grow and develop as a minister in God's church through her roles here as Curate and then Associate Minister. Everyone has been blessed by her presence with us and wish her success and happiness in her new role.

As we look forward to 2011 we can be secure that the ministry of our church, through the people God has called and continues to call to be part of it, will continue to call people to God and transformed lives.

Revd. Patrick Sherring.