

## Review of the year 2009.

2009 has been distinctive in that it is a year when as a church community we have taken more seriously our need to grow as Christians and understand how our faith should relate to our daily lives. Jesus said that the essence of the faith is *Love God and love your neighbour as yourself*. 2009 has been a year when we have taken these words to heart.

With a steadily and firmly growing congregation over the year, together with the reality that many people through work patterns find it difficult to engage in church activities in the evenings, we have looked to address the question of how we can help people to grow in faith. For a number of years we have encouraged people to buy the New Daylights Bible Reading Notes and those taking these have increased to over thirty. Thanks are due to Marjorie Perring for continuing to administer the system. The monthly group for those who take the notes alternates around the homes of regular members. Revd. Sue Cruse has continued to run the Getting to Know the Bible Course for those interested in this introduction to the Bible. But we wanted something that could be offered to all the congregation. In January we began the pattern of using the second Sunday service as a specific teaching time. The format has been Morning Prayer in a slightly shortened form, with a sermon related to the later educational activity. Then after tea, coffee and often cakes, we have moved into a video presentation at 11 a.m, followed by a discussion. We have used *Changing Lives for Good*, produced by the Diocese of Bath and Wells, and *Apprentice*, developed by Revd. Steve Chalke from Oasis Trust. Over thirty people, who have been happy to stay and participate until noon, have regularly attended these challenging sessions. This has been a major development in the life of the church and has been delivered by Revd. Sue Cruse.

Over recent years we have been seeking to engage the church with the wider life of the local community. Our involvement in

the Church Junior School is very significant. Sue Prescott had been Chair of Governors for a number of years, before handing over to me during the year. Her work and commitment to the school has also involved offering her expertise to voluntarily assist with the teaching of maths. Allen Matthews retired from being a governor this year and his knowledge on matters relating to buildings has been invaluable. Regular church members constitute over half the governing body and give generously of their time, for which everyone is very grateful. I take an assembly each week and also review the Religious Education at the end of each half term. The Prayer Group meets at the school after the assembly the first Wednesday of each month. It would be good if more people were able to attend this important activity. The school attended the church for Easter, Leavers' and Harvest services. Through gifts from people at both this and Fryerning church we were once again able to give each year six leavers a Youth Bible.

The Uniformed Organisations continue to play a very valuable role in the life of the young people of the community and also within the church family. Their leaders are to be congratulated. Attendance and participation at the Family services give vitality to these acts of worship. Special note should be given to the Remembrance Service, where there was large attendance of representatives from these groups across the ages, where they all behaved impeccably showing the respect they hold for the occasion. Representatives from all the village schools, the Parish Council and Brentwood Council made this a true civic occasion.

With the Mayor of Brentwood, Tony Sleep, coming from the local community, it was appropriate to hold the Civic Service for the installation of the new mayor in the church. We had not hosted such a service since 1993 and it was a very memorable occasion. The Mayor, Parish Councillors and the M.P. were all part of the village celebrations for the Victorian evening, where the church played a central part. Thanks are due to all the volunteers involved during the evening, The Ingatestone Choral

Society, The Anglo European School and the bell ringers and hand-bell ringers for providing activities throughout the evening. The lines of people trying to get into the church stretched down to the High Street.

Sunday worship is of course central to the life of the church. Many people are involved beyond the ministry team of myself, Revd. Sue Cruse, Revd. Miranda Seaman and our Reader Sue Elliott-Jones, who was officially received into the Diocese at a service in Chelmsford Cathedral. Ian Cruse plays an invaluable part in choosing the music and working with the choir. It has been wonderful to welcome new members to the choir to join those who have been undertaking this important service for many years. Pat Coleman, Linda Boyce and others who work so creatively with the church flowers help with the atmosphere for worship. Gerry Prescott, Marjorie Perring and Alison Churchett, ensure all is set for the communion services. Phyllis Cooper organises our readers from the Bible and Marie Davison those who lead the intercession prayers. Twice a month the three groups of Sunday Club operate in parallel to the main part of the service. Mark Jobin, Brynne Poole and Katie Thomas show great dedication to the vital task of working with the children. This is real Christian education and more people are needed to join the team. There are many people involved with the welcome team who make sure everyone receives a warm welcome. They provide refreshments after the services. Thanks go to everyone for working towards each act of worship held at the church being a time of fellowship as well as engagement with God.

We continue to have many baptisms, showing how this activity of Christian initiation is still valued in our community. The number of young families with attachment to the church in this way raises questions of how we provide for them beyond the service. The EMUs under fives group, with a very dedicated group of volunteers, provides an invaluable service. The monthly Monday under fives service aims to provide an exciting

act of worship for them, but with limited success. How to address this issue is a major consideration for the church.

The number of weddings and funerals in the church has declined during this year. This was expected, as we took some services for Fryerning in 2008 during the building work at that church. However, it remains a matter of concern that so few local people choose the church for these important family occasions. This is in great contrast to special occasions, particularly Christmas, when nearly 20% of the village community attend the church. The Towers magazine provides a vital link to this wider community and thanks are due to Pat Clark, Teresa Cattell-Hollox, and Margaret Taylor for their work in compilation, to Betty Weaver for organising the distribution and for Jill Williams in arranging the advertising. The website administered by John Hammond, also provides a vital link in providing information and showing the ministry and relevance of the church.

Our P.C.C. meet monthly and are all involved with issues relating to the management of the church. Particular appreciation is due to Allen Matthews and Michael Allen who work tirelessly in their roles as Churchwardens. Richard Hollox has worked efficiently as our P.C.C. Secretary and Martin Taylor as our Treasurer. Fundraising, both to pay our regular commitment to the Diocese of Chelmsford and also develop our building has continued to be addressed. Our Gift Day on Easter Saturday will be a regular event, but we need to address the level of regular giving, which places us 19<sup>th</sup> out of 21 churches in the Deanery of Brentwood.

Our mission to *Love God and love our neighbour as ourselves* can best be demonstrated by our commitment to give to those in need. Our level of giving to the work of Harvest for the Hungry and Operation Christmas Child increased this year, despite the very difficult economic climate. It was wonderful that Radi and Plumy from Bulgaria, our partners in Harvest for the Hungry,

were able to speak to both the P.C.C. and also the children at the Junior School. Our church then provided the entire self-funded delivery team to go to Lom in Bulgaria and be involved in the distribution of the boxes of aid collected throughout Essex. The team was led by Revd. Sue Cruse, and included Janet Brandis, Kate Thomas and myself. We had an amazing week, during which some of the poorest people in Europe showed us nothing but kindness and generosity. This was a humbling and life changing experience.

Whilst of course we always have concerns for the upkeep of the building and how it can be developed for the mission of God in the community in which we are placed, we should never forget that the church is the people. We have a good number of active, dedicated people. It is part of the work of the ministry team to always be looking to deepen people in their faith and offer opportunities for this to happen. May we grow in love and trust of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to love God and love our neighbours as ourselves.

Revd. Patrick Sherring.