

Revd. Frances Drake.

The retirement of Frances, I find it hard to believe that phrase, needs to be marked. It has been a great joy to work alongside Frances since our memorable joint service on 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2001. The service marked our appointment to our respective parishes, giving a clear intention that we should have a close working relationship. I am delighted to say that we have had a close and productive relationship over that period. I, as so many others, have benefited from the ministry of Frances.

Local church history will give Frances a unique position. She was the first woman member of the clergy appointed to Fryerning. This was in 1993, when Fryerning was then grouped with Margaretting and Mountnessing. Canon John Brown announced the news of Frances' impending arrival in September in the June edition of the Tower. 'In this edition I write with a sense of excitement...Miss Frances Drake will be ordained Deacon to serve with me in our three parishes...Frances will continue to be employed as a Deputy Head teacher in a large comprehensive school in Upminster...my hope is that Frances will be a catalyst to prompt others to consider consciously sharing in the Church's ministry'. Canon John's article bristles with excitement. Frances introduced herself in the September edition. Frances was writing whilst on holiday in the Scilly Isles. She wrote with gratitude at having been welcomed by the three congregations and of how she was looking forward to her new role and walking her labrador around the lanes and footpaths of the parishes in the hope of meeting people that way. She wrote, 'Like many of you I am having to work out how to be and do and live as a Christian within the workplace, sometimes against considerable pressures, and to learn how to organise time and energy between the many calls on my life. These are the experiences which we share together in a very practical sense and from which our theology continues to grow.'

Hindsight tells us how much Frances was and is loved and respected by the people of these three parishes. A year later, following her ordination as Priest in the Church of England,

Frances became the first woman to celebrate communion in these churches.

With the retirement of Phillip Coulton from Ingatestone and Buttsbury in 1999, Frances steered the parishes through an interregnum that included the consideration of pastoral re-organisation, ending with the groupings of parishes that we have today. During that time her reputation grew to encompass these other two parishes, where she also became the first woman to celebrate communion. All this and she was still working in teaching. I first spoke to Frances on the telephone in the autumn of 2000. This bright and enthusiastic voice bubbled with excitement and the possibilities of our ministry. When I first met Frances a few weeks later she lived up to her voice. The possibilities of serving the three parishes to which she had been appointed and working alongside me filled her with delight. She was over-flowing with amazement concerning all that God had done and would do in the future. I looked forward to working with her.

Our joint service was a remarkable and memorable occasion that will be unique in the history of these parishes. As we sat together we both found it amazing to think God had given us such a privilege. The following nearly six years have indeed been a privilege. There are many instances I could recount. All of you who have had the experience of ministry with Frances will have your personal recollections. But I am sure her smile and laugh will be there amongst them.

Because of her apparently boundless energy I know many people simply could not imagine Francis being retired. Being Francis she will, of course, still be busy. I know she has many plans for her well-earned retirement. She has been an inspiration to many people in so many ways. I feel blessed to have had Frances as a colleague and graced to have her as a friend. I write on behalf of so many people wishing her happiness in the future.

Patrick.