



Saffron Walden & Villages Team Ministry
Saffron Walden Deanery
Team Rector and Area Dean: Rev Jeremy Trew
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Rector's Report, May 2023

The year 2022 has been a time of recovery and finding a new footing. It amazes me that I am still occasionally meeting people for the first time who are telling me they are only just venturing back to Church after the fears and doubts provoked by Covid. Its impact is still being felt and will be for some time. Only the other day someone asked me if we might receive communion drinking directly from the chalice. This is once again allowed, but medical opinion suggests that it is not good practice. Therein lies one of the conundrums of the current situation: the balance of challenges to practice what is familiar and traditional against our responsibility to consider the more vulnerable amongst us and put their needs before our own.

So, as last year, my thanks for "bearing with". That is; bearing with a slowly evolving environment in which we live out our faith, and bearing with me, as I work out my ministry amongst you. My thanks to those who continuously give faithful service and wise guidance. If I try and list you all, I will inevitably miss some out and give offence. So, simply, please receive my thanks. However, I will mention Gill, who has served another year as Churchwarden. This year we hope to recruit a new Churchwarden to serve alongside Gill. This sharing of the task makes it all the more doable. That is also true of every other activity that contributes to the life of our Church family from week to week, of course. My thanks also to the many people who make St Mary's, St James' and St John's happen, and happen so well. My thanks also (somewhat in anticipation) to those who serve on the PCC, Deanery Synod, and the various committees of our three churches. From cleaning and decorating our buildings, welcoming at the door, leading our worship and making music, and refreshing us afterwards.

2022 allowed a full range of services for the first time since 2019. It was a joy to celebrate Easter more fully, 2021 having been desperately sparse. The highlight, for me, was the Churches Together Good Friday Walk of Witness: So many Christians across several traditions, all ending up at St Mary's was an absolute joy to be part of. Ending the year with the wonder of Christmas was again a privilege. Numbers were significantly up on the year before, and numbers across the more ordinary Sundays were still showing a gentle rise.

However, it has been suggested that most Christian congregations have lost around a third of their active membership through Covid, representing a decade or more of numerical decline in just two years. For many it is nothing more than getting out of the habit of churchgoing, often through building alternative patterns that have been judged to be more worthwhile. At the very least this begs the question as to why we come to church, and what need it fulfils for us in our lives. In response we are looking to develop intentional discipleship across the Team, helping individuals to own their faith and seek to deepen it. This started with our Lent studies and will continue across the year. A word I like regarding this is "praxis". In a faith context it means "faith, worked out, by putting theory into



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practice.” The faith we declare in our Creeds is not firstly an academic statement, but rather a pronouncement of the values that we seek to allow our daily lives to be shaped by. For the Christian faith was never intended to be a passive belief system, but rather a lifestyle, reflecting the character of God and offered as an act of worship to God, seeking to reform the world we live in.

2023 brings with it other challenges, one of which is financial:

- We have recently received our Quinquennial Report. This five-yearly inspection of the church building has highlighted several works we would be well advised to undertake. The most significant of these is the repair of the north aisle roof, similar to the work we had done on the chancel recently and costing a similar amount. We a near to moving the Audley tomb. This is largely funded by a specific bequest but will also draw on church funds to a small degree.
- Then there is the organ..... Yes, that’s the biggie, and the one that will need to be handled as a major project spread out over several years. The challenge being not just the rather large amount needed to provide an instrument suitable for our large building and strong music tradition, but the concern that the current instrument will last the course of this project. My thanks to those who keep our current organ maintained and those who have already started work on proposals for the future.
- Finally, having presided at worship here for two years, and having led the well supported Lent group looking at the changing practices of the eucharist in the Christian story, I am looking to propose the creation of a nave dais. This both brings the celebration of the eucharist into the heart of the Church, where it is meant to be, and would also allow space for the choir to come forward from behind the chancel screen so that they can better fulfil their primary role of giving a lead to our sung worship. It has the additional benefits of;
 - Creating a lengthy altar rail where communicants can stand or kneel to receive communion and which all can reach.
 - Allowing the inclusion of access for those with mobility difficulties.
 - Providing a low “stage” that will enhance concerts and other such events.

It is fascinating to see that similar schemes have been explored at least three times since the chancel screen was installed. The screen is a beautiful object, but it is also a barrier to sound and effectively cuts our worship into two parts. Its removal would present greater challenges than the construction of a suitable dais.

The entire purpose of what is written above is the simple desire that as a community of Christians we may deepen our faith and live it out more and more effectively, so that others are blessed by God through us and drawn to follow too.

Two more things: I have other commitments; as Team Rector, as Area Dean, and in other aspects of Diocesan life. Plus, I am also part of a Team. Of both, I am grateful. They enrich and enhance what I am able to offer you. For our Churches to grow healthily we will need to function more as a Team offering mutual support and ministry so that all may flourish.



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Whatever you make of my words here please know that I am working for you and for our churches, here in Saffron Walden, across the Team, and across the Deanery. Please continue to be kind and gracious to me. Please continue to tell me what you think, fear and hope for. Please pray for me and with me, that together we may do the work of God in this place.

Yours faithfully

Jeremy

...any questions?