

Vicar's report 2019.

A year ago at Whitley Chapel we were coming to the end of one of the longest and coldest winters in recent years. Our school was under threat of closure and the future looked tough.

Thankfully, the threat to the school has been lifted, the crisis caused the community to rally behind its school, and the academic year ended with an extremely successful inspection by Ofsted. The numbers in the school are increasing and, with the involvement of Barbara Parker and Jane Wrighton, the Church plays an active role in the life of the school.

Numbers of baptisms at Church have been steady, and once again couples are coming to be married at Whitley.

Last Spring we had beautiful weather for our Church Open Day, which was much enjoyed by those who came, and the Progressive Supper at the end of September was a great way to bring people together.

Good Friday last year was a great success, though it almost ended in tragedy with my mother's accident, and Christmas Eve was perhaps the best yet, with a most happy baby Jesus and the shepherds led in by a piper to the Duchess of Northumberland. Of course, none of this would happen without the enthusiasm and determination of Carole.

One event which stands out for me in the past year was the commemoration of the centenary of Armistice Day at the Parish Hall. The planning was driven with characteristic energy by Peter McKendrick and largely put together by the Churchwardens. The involvement of so many, from the children in school to Dave Southern who synchronised our two minutes' silence with that at the Cenotaph (and on the playing field at Whitley Chapel) was inspiring. We had no idea who would attend. The late scramble to put out more chairs, and looking out on a completely full Parish Hall completely vindicated the faith of those who had planned this event.

I want to express my thanks to our Churchwardens, Hon. Treasurer and Accountant, Hon. Sec. and members of the PCC. I particularly want to thank Shirley, Tom and Jane who provide us with real music for our weekly worship, and to all who keep the Church clean, decorate it with flowers, welcome people into Church and help to lead worship by reading and by leading intercessions.

I want to thank Tony for continuing to ensure that the Churchyard is a beautiful and fit place where our dead may be laid to rest.

Special thanks this year go to Claire Bradley who has taken on the publication of the new electoral roll of the Church.

I would also like to express my thanks to Claire Pinches who for many years has turned our sometimes rambling discussions into clear and succinct minutes with promptness and efficiency. It is with sadness that we must accept Claire's retirement as Hon .Sec. She will be seriously missed.

Looking ahead over the coming year, we have of course the Garden Trail to look forward to on June 23rd, and the dedication of a new window inspired by the children of our school.

However, we face serious challenges. Our last appeal for increased giving to the Church was only partially successful.

We have only been able to meet our financial responsibilities in this past year by drawing on our reserves. Although Hexham Deanery as a whole is doing quite well, the situation across the diocese is not great.

Though there are new faces in our congregation, we continue to be an ageing Church. The Baby and Toddler group continues to be a valued addition to the life of this community, and I know our school gives our children a solid Christian grounding. The presence of mothers and small children in Church on Mothering Sunday was a great joy. We still need to work out how our Church can be a place for families and young people.

Whatever the difficulties, St.Helen's Church continues to be a house of God for Hexhamshire.

I have no doubt Christ will use, direct and bless us in his service.

God bless you all