

Vicar's report 2017

Last year we began to look into how we might respond to the presence in our community of a significant number of young families with small children.

Many people in Hexhamshire already have strong networks of family and friends, but quite a number of new families have moved into the parish.

We agreed that a baby and toddler group was a way in which the Church could reach out to these families and, since September, the group has met very successfully in the Parish Hall.

For me, this has been the high point of the year, and I am most grateful to Claire Bradley, Jane Wrighton, and Jenny Stirling who turned the vision into reality, and thanks to whom the group flourishes, with excellent support from Rachael Haywood Smith and a number of mothers, notably Claire Nixon. About 15 or 16 families attend, or have attended.

It may not immediately translate into people in Church on Sundays, but these families are the future of our parish. Right now they know we care about them; there is a link. Numbers of these families were as, a result, present at the Christingle and Nativity services over Christmas.

Safeguarding has become a very high-priority issue in the Church and, with on-going inquiries and revelations in the news, this situation is likely to continue. I am therefore particularly thankful to Jenny Stirling for all the work she puts into ensuring that we comply with what the Church requires of us in this regard.

In most organisations, wages are the largest cost. The Church is no different; the cost of my being at Whitley Chapel is met out of parish share, with a large subsidy from the diocese. The finances of the diocese are poor, and are likely to get worse. The whole basis of how parishes are structured and funded will be looked at, and Bishop Christine is putting her programme in place.

Meanwhile, at Whitley Chapel, our income has been falling. Our regular giving has been in decline, we have received less in fees, and we have had no major fundraising events in the last year.

It is 5 years since we last looked at planned giving, and David and Claire are working on a fundraising appeal, which will begin next month.

The diocese is proposing to centralise finances, and to set out a common fundraising programme. We hope we are right to believe that people in Hexhamshire will respond generously and support their parish Church.

Our worship in Church continues to be enriched by the participation of many people: those who act as sidesmen, who read, and who lead us in prayer and in song, and especially Shirley Nixon and the ladies' choir, Jane Wrighton and Tom Cowing. His lively harmonies on the accordion make for a unique experience, and we are very fortunate.

The Church is kept clean, and decorated with flowers, and remains an open and welcoming place for all.

With the passing years we all grow older; it is a sadness for us all when someone reaches the point where they are ready to retire.

For over twenty years Garth Parker has carefully audited our accounts, free of charge, and it is right that we have the opportunity to thank him.

For forty years Gwen Dixon has been a member of this PCC, and it comes as quite a shock that she will no longer be a councillor. Nevertheless, this is only a very small part of her life and ministry as a Christian. I don't think anyone could count the number of people she has visited, the cards sent, and those to whom she has ministered. We pray God will continue to bless her here and wherever he leads her in his service.

I am grateful for the enthusiasm, hard work and support of your parish officers, Barbara Parker, Val Hull, Claire Pinches, David Wilson and Claire Bradley.

I am grateful to Carole my wife who produces our celebrations on Christmas Eve, Palm Sunday and Good Friday which are enjoyed by so many.

I am grateful to Val Hull, Lynn Mould and Barbara Parker for building links with our school.

I am grateful to Peter McKendrick who puts our Church rota together, and is so good at asking people to get involved.

We are not the biggest of churches but the Spirit of God is among us. We should look forward with hope and confidence for the coming year

Andrew Patterson