

St. Leonard's Church. Vicar's report 2018-19

This year we have consolidated many new initiatives from the last few years. In terms of Annual events and services, we once again held a 'Remember loved ones service' and this year I attended an afternoon at Lavinia house with Freeman brothers as part of the national campaign 'Dying Matters.' We had a very enjoyable St. Leonard's day service followed by drinks and nibbles, and our Winter Fayre was very well attended, enjoyable and raised a healthy sum of money.

Numbers at the Services celebrating major Christian festivals were largely inline with last year, which is encouraging. General attendance has once again increased – especially on the 1st Sundays of the month when we are now opening the partition to the hall. Our Families afternoons have gone from strength to strength-we regularly get around 40 people who are a mixture of regular church goers and those we have met in our community through Little Leo's, schools, baptisms and other outreach events.

On the fifth Sunday of the month we have had a service concentrating on Inclusion, BEATs charity, and a Songs of Praise where members of the congregation shared their personal testimonies. On the third Sunday of the month the children have been moving into the Peter Apted room during the sermon to receive age specific teaching. This has been greatly appreciated by them and their parents. Two young people from our church also join in with the Parish Youth work – particularly attending Café Connect – the monthly joint youth service.

At Harvest we collected food for Turning Tides, and we have also made collections for Family Support Work in response to the local deanery committee being reformed and the potential of a Social Worker for our area. Members of the congregation have been involved in helping at the food bank and with supporting other charities- both with their time and financial giving. At New Year we took part in the Covenant Service at St. Mary's and regularly pray with the other Team churches at HOPE prayer. We also joined together at the Cathedral for Evensong when the Parish was prayed for.

One of the biggest surprises this year was the huge number of people – around 300, who came through our doors at Halloween. This is clearly going to be our biggest outreach event of the year should we decide to repeat this. We will need to consider how to respond to this excellent opportunity.

Our building is constantly in use and we host many community groups and parties. However, undoubtedly the best thing we were able to use it for this year was to host the Horsham Churches Together Night shelter.

During the year we have faced some significant administrative tasks. Firstly, we had our Quinquennial inspection which was largely as we expected in terms of works, we need to do to the building. Our new Welcome area is nearly complete and makes the point that the church is alive and active and we're not just a building. Facing the challenge of GDPR we

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moved all our contacts onto the Church Suite cloud-based package. Organisationally, I tried to split the DCC in Co-Ordinating Groups (CoGs), but this has not been a success.

Regular services of Morning Prayer continue along with communion at Glen Arun and recently we have added a service at Aspen place. The Vicar is a Governor at Heron Way School and takes regular assemblies and different groups of children have attended St. Mary's to find out about church. Many have never been in a church before. We also took part in the Heron Way fete and attend a parent's prayer group when my time allows. Recently our links with Kingslea have grown. Recently I taught 4 groups (120 children in total) the Easter story, took assemblies and hosted some of the children at the church. The local Beaver group also came to visit the church for one of their sessions, and we have maintained links with the Phoenix Stroke Club and Montessori nursery.

The LINK group for older people has flourished. Baptisms – both here and at St. Mary's have been about average but there have been more many more funerals this year. As part of the Diocesan year of prayer our lay reader Margaret ran an excellent course of Celtic Spirituality both at St. Leonard's and at Holy Trinity.

The year has been very unsettling in terms of staffing in the Parish and this has put considerable extra pressure on me and has impacted what we've been able to do at St. Leonard's. However, I have become the Training Incumbent to Rebecca Tuck who has been working with me during the week and coming to St. Leonard's one Sunday a month. It is a huge privilege for us to be part of her training and we look forward to her Ordination and first celebration of Communion in June.

Despite all the organisation challenges and extra work, the most important thing in ministry is this growing church family, and if we don't have time to be family together, something is wrong. We must not lose sight of caring for one another and those in our community who are vulnerable.

Looking ahead – in the summer we will be celebrating the church's 80th birthday. We have plans to run the course 'Christianity Explored' in September and a follow-on course next January. We have organised a sermon series on Healing which will conclude with a Healing Service. I have invited Fiona Prentice back for another Godly Play session, and members of the church will go way together for the first time in several years on Pilgrimage to Walsingham.

In the New Year I shared a verse from Isaiah 43. 'See, I'm doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it?' We pray that God will continue to do new things in this church and spring up exciting shoots of new life in our Parish at this time of change.

Revd Natalie Loveless