

ST LEONARD'S REPORT – MARCH 2020

I said I wouldn't do another interregnum but here I am again, so this is going to be a combined Reader's Report and St Leonard's Annual Report this year.

Sadly, Natalie left us at the end of November to become Vicar of Rustington. Up to that point we were very positive about our Church life.

A group of us went on a 3-day pilgrimage to Walsingham last April. We stayed at the Anglican Shrine and took part in many of the Shrine activities and prayers as well as our own outings to the Roman Catholic Shrine, other parts of Walsingham and Wells-next-the-Sea. It was a happy, holy and sociable few days.

We have not only continued our monthly Communion services at Glen Arun and Aspen Place Care Homes but we have also committed to a monthly service with Communion at Rosedale Care Home. Now that Natalie has left us Rebecca has taken over the Glen Arun Communion service but I assist her with this and lead the other two care home services.

LINK has suffered a bit of a dip recently as three members have not been well enough to attend regularly. However, those who do come still seem to enjoy the activities – there are five helpers who join in with everything so we are never too short on numbers to have fun!

The Monday Home Group continues to meet twice a month and had a couple of successful social evenings during the year, one *Bring and Share* meal, one Chinese meal. The Wednesday afternoon group tried meeting on Wednesday mornings but had too few members to be able to have any meaningful discussion so has now finally ended.

A group from St Leonard's attended the Chrism Mass in Chichester Cathedral in Holy Week 2019; on Maundy Thursday we walked 6K for the World Vision water appeal then had a soup, bread and cheese supper, followed by a Communion service. Our Good Friday Liturgy was well attended, with tea and hot cross buns afterwards. On Easter Sunday we had our usual Family Celebration Communion and Easter Egg Hunt, with good attendance.

Natalie re-vamped the Families Afternoons to provide more activities, especially for the older children, and the ones we held were well attended. Sadly, these afternoons, as well as Little Leos, had to be suspended during the recent building work and now Natalie has gone there are insufficient helpers to resume these activities.

Fish and chip suppers continued into the Spring, were paused for the Summer and, apart from the September meal when we were delighted to host Saut, one of the BEATS workers from Indonesia, who gave us an update on the work there, have not re-started. We hope to be able to continue with some form of social activity to replace them. In January and February we held a *Bring and Share* lunch and a Coffee Morning to start this off.

I have continued to lead the Pastoral group and we try to visit all those who are unwell or otherwise unable to attend church on Sundays. Prayer Ministry continues every Sunday during Communion and there are always people asking for prayer. We also have a table where people can make personal prayers and light a candle.

We have continued to support the parish HOPE Prayers and led our share of the meetings during 2019 and January 2020.

We held our annual *Newcomers' Tea* and *Remembering Loved Ones* services, both of which were well attended.

In the Autumn we held a *Christianity Explored* course which was attended by regular members of the congregation as well as a number of newcomers. We also held a sermon series on Healing which culminated in a Healing Service on the 5th Sunday in September.

The highlight of the year took place in September with our 80th birthday celebration. We hosted over 100 people for a *Songs of Praise* service, followed by afternoon tea, and it was delightful to see so many old friends.

Another highlight was Halloween, when we offered hot chocolate and glo-sticks to local families and children as they went about their "Trick or Treat" activities. Over 400 people visited us and their comments were really positive - they were so pleased to see the Church engaged with the community in this way.

I know that Natalie took a number of funerals while she was with us, three of which were, sadly, for members (and a former member) of our congregation - Terry Clark, Enid Hayward and Freda Dawes. We were so sad to lose them and thank God for their many years of witness, worship and the many things they have done for us. Terry was Warden for probably the maximum number of years he was allowed to be but continued to play an active and full role afterwards; Enid was valued for her quiet faith and her faithfulness to St Leonard's Church and the Lord. Freda arranged our flowers for years until she sadly stopped attending owing to ill-health but was happy and comfortable in Wellcross Grange Home where I know she was visited by the Slinfold Team. I have taken three funerals since Natalie left and I am grateful to other members of the team for their willingness to help us with these. It has to be noted, though, that fewer and fewer people seem to be wanting religious funerals these days.

Sunday services continue to follow the pattern of Family Worship on 1st and 3rd Sundays, with a more traditional Sung Eucharist on the 2nd and 4th Sundays. Numbers are fairly steady but, despite putting on family friendly informal worship and finding opportunities for teaching the children, the families do not come, especially now that Natalie has left.

The Morning Prayer services have continued, although now only once a week, and are attended by a handful of people. Thanks go to Stuart for leading them and to Sarah for supporting him.

Christmas saw our usual Carol Service take place without a Vicar (led by me) and Christingle, led by the Youth Worker, Lee, to which over 100 people came. Christmas morning was quiet but that is always the case – our numbers at Sunday services remain stable and steady which is more important. However, we are concerned that there are insufficient people for major activities and events – it is always the same few who attend and help and while I know that is often the case in church life, it does not bode well for future growth, especially as we all get older.

For my own part, I have continued to preach more or less once a month and organise or assist with other activities. I have remained DCC Secretary, a position I am only too willing to relinquish if anyone else wants to do it, and I am grateful to Tim Hewlett for his Minute writing since Natalie left. I have become Parish Warden and that enabled me to participate in selecting our new Team Rector, Lisa, one of my former students!

Celtic Christianity is my personal specialism and I was scheduled to give a talk on this to Mothers' Union until the coronavirus cancelled it.

I am still a BEATS Trustee; I gave an update on the earthquake and tsunami relief work to the PMA group at Brighton Road Baptist Church in October and I am still Secretary for the Horsham Interfaith Forum as well as a member of the Southwater and Crawley Interfaith groups. I am still interested in developing Lay Ministries in Horsham Parish; I have met with the St Mary's Readers and we are hopeful for lay ministries in the future.

I had a genuine concern for our future at St Leonard's. We are an ageing congregation and have seen little growth in recent years; too much responsibility currently has to be placed on too few people, none of whom are getting any younger! However, I am pleased with Lisa's approach to churches working together more and I look forward to forthcoming developments.

Thanks must go to all those who help at our events, all those who come faithfully every Sunday, those who do flowers and coffees, and decorate the church for special occasions. My particular thanks go to Lyn Astridge who has at last been able to lay down the role of Treasurer after a number of years... and to Barbara Hammond for being brave enough to take on the role. To Ray Hambling who, as Hall Manager, has borne the brunt of organisation and liaison for builders and decorators during the time of the flood and subsequent repairs. To Rosemary Hensor who is not only Warden but plays the organ Sunday after Sunday and on all those special occasions too; and to Anne Apted who wanted to stand down as Warden this year but who has now said she will continue to support us in this way. I would like to thank the team, too - Bernard, Pat, Alan, Rebecca and now Lisa – for their support. Lastly, I have to thank Richard for his patience and willingness to put up with my being out at meetings, visiting or asking him to be quiet while I concentrate! Thanking people is a dangerous thing to do, for one nearly always leaves out someone who should be included! So if you haven't been mentioned by name please forgive me and know that you are still appreciated.

Margaret Symonds
Reader & Parish Warden