

Vicar's Report for 2023 and 2024

I would like to thank all those who work so hard for the mission of God's Church in Portslade and Mile Oak. We are so fortunate in this parish to have a set of hardworking, committed and devout churchwardens. I am very grateful to Alan Langridge, Ann Beard, Lisa Hughes and Gill Wilks for all their work, support and commitment. In addition to them, Marian Burke and Roger Reeve make up the Standing Committee of the PCC that works so hard for parish throughout the year. Alan is also our treasurer, a demanding task that takes up a great deal of his time and Ann is our PCC secretary. On behalf of us all, I thank you. Your many hours of hard work is deeply appreciated. To all of the PCC and Deanery Synod members, thank you. Brian Taylor is standing down from the PCC today and I would like to put on record my thanks for his years of faithful service.

To Chris and her flower arrangers in St Nicolas and to Ann Beard and her team at The Good Shepherd, thank you. To all those who clean our churches and provide refreshments after services, thank you. Kayleigh Beard, who is employed as halls manager, deserves a special mention. She goes above and beyond to make sure our halls are kept clean and are managed well. She is also a constant source of ideas for fundraising and works hard for the wider community.

In a parish in the Catholic (High Church) tradition the sacristans and servers play a key role. Our worship relies on their preparation, hours of hard work behind the scenes and being unflappable when the vicar has a new idea. Thank you to Ken Rist and Elaine and Brian Taylor for your commitment and hard work. I am also very grateful to Daphne Coleman for playing the keyboard and for the choir St Nicolas. I would like to pay tribute at this point to Ron Bayfield who died last year. He was a stalwart organist and committed member of our parish. He was so generous with his time and talents and I miss his dry, acerbic wit.

My final thanks go to each one of you here today and everybody on the electoral roll of the parish. It is only through your commitment, prayers and faith that we can continue God's mission in Portslade and Mile Oak.

Mission

Looking forward, we must, as Christians, look to the Mission of God in Portslade and Mile Oak. Over the past few years our numbers have been declining, especially at The Good Shepherd, Mile Oak. If we are to secure our Christian community we must engage in mission. It will be the task of the

newly elected PCC to look seriously at this issue. It is auspicious that this APCM takes place on the feast of Pentecost, the day the Church resounds to the joy of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The very earliest Church consisted of 12 Apostles and rag bag of followers of Jesus. It was a tiny community among the Jewish community which was, in itself, just a small province in the vast Roman Empire. How such a small group of people were able, eventually, to convert the Roman Empire must be evidence of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

It is easy to get disheartened and fall into depression when we see our society drifting away from belief in God. Our Church, for so many centuries, the beating heart of the nation is sidelined and ignored. It isn't just that the people reject God, they do not see the need for faith at all.

The only way we can reverse the trend is by trusting God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God has a plan for the parish of Portslade and Mile Oak.

Therese of Lisieux OCD (2 January 1873 – 30 September 1897), also known as Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is, I believe, a great example and inspiration for us. St Therese was only 24 when she died, an obscure nun, unknown to the wider world. However, Therese had a burning desire to pray for priests, especially those called to mission. Her life, hidden in prayer, had, and has, a huge impact on the Church. Christians from many denominations are inspired by her life and prayers.

If God's Mission is to flourish in our parish, we must first pray and enfold ourselves in the life of God. Therese was, at the end of her life, tormented by a spiritual darkness. However, she never wavered in her love of God and her devotion to Jesus, her Lord. We must pray for the community we love and entrust it to the Holy Spirit.

So Mission must begin and end in prayer.

I have asked the senior Missioner for the Society of Wilfrid and Hilda to help us with this mission. I have already had a meeting with Fr Chris Brading and invited him to a PCC Away Day where we can spend some time in prayer and discussion.

Our greatest advantage is our churches that are at the heart of our parish. Moreover, our halls are tremendous resource not only for us but for the wider community. In the coming year I would like to start a Dementia Café for those suffering from it and their carers. I know from first hand experience how traumatic and costly it can be when a loved one is struck by dementia.

Hopefully in the coming year the PCC will be able to look creatively at what our communities need and how we can work to address them.

Of course our Church life also needs funding and so the PCC will need to look at our fundraising and, in my view, most importantly, a Stewardship Campaign looking to extend the membership of the Parish Giving Scheme and encouraging people to use their talents to the building of our Church community. There are currently 29 members of the Parish Giving Scheme and a few who give directly to our bank account on a regular basis and a few who still use the envelope scheme. The PGS raises about £1180 plus £260 Gift Aid per month. There are 81 people on the electoral roll, not to mention others who worship in our churches. It is clear that there is great scope to increase our regular giving. The more stable and predictable our finances are, the easier it will be to plan mission and growth. But it isn't only about money. We need to reach out to all those in the parish who hold good will towards our churches and the Church of England. I am sure there are many in Portslade and Mile Oak who would be willing to help look after our churches because they represent a precious heritage.

I am convinced that the Holy Spirit will guide and enthuse us for this task of furthering God's Kingdom in our community. The coming year will be very challenging as we work to build up our Christian life together. Let us remember St Therese of Lisieux, she became an instrument of God's love and the Holy Spirit. It was prayer that was the engine of mission, a trust in the goodness of God and that He is always faithful to the people He has created and loves. Jesus died for all of us and he has a purpose for Portslade and Mile Oak.

Christ is risen, Alleluia!
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!