

## **Rector's Report for APCM 28th April 2024**

I am not going to read the annual report to you, you can read it yourselves. The annual report that is published and sent out is a summary that complies with charity commission guidelines and fulfils our responsibilities as trustees. This is my supplementary verbal report for the APCM, my pen picture of the parish if you like!

I was licensed 11 months ago, after a long vacancy period, and so this, my first APCM, report comes from that starting point. I have spent much of this first year getting to know people, hearing their stories, and stories about the church, being present in the church and the parish, and beginning to see where new systems or ways of doing things might be useful.

Around Christmas I began to realise that in order to grow and flourish St. Margaret's had to stop trying to do more things, or throwing stuff at the wall to see what sticks to use a phrase I read, and instead enter a period of repair and restoration in order to see regrowth. I gave the sermon about the boat in the harbour, and that is linked to my sermon this morning about pruning.

Just before Easter I embarked on a 9 month course called Remissioning, part learning, part coaching. I tried a taster day in January and it felt like this process would be of huge benefit to St. Margaret's and to me as your Rector. The idea of the process is first to strip back, to prune and to ask some really difficult questions of ourselves - to learn from the past, to keep what is useful for innovation and growth and to let go of those things that aren't.

Pruning a tree or plant can look drastic: Clearing or cleansing can be painful. But in both cases new life, new growth and new fruit can come from it.

At St. Margaret's over the next 12 months there will be pruning. It will not be easy. It will not be comfortable. But we need to do it because there are dead branches. I will be starting the process with the PCC and the new warden team but this is a process for all of us.

You did not appoint me to keep the status quo, you appointed me, and I believe that God called me here to help the church grow, to help the church prune the dead wood, or creatively destroy to use another phrase, the things that are no longer bearing fruit, so that new growth can emerge and over time new fruit can grow.

My challenge to you today is to ask you to answer this question: what does St. Margaret's do that you think needs to be pruned, stopped, or creatively destroyed, so that new life, new growth and new fruit can appear?

It is my hope that in this initial period we might explore some of the stories we tell ourselves about who this church is and what it does, and alongside that ask ourselves why we do what we do. The question of what is our why is a key thing, and one we will be sitting with for a while. The process then helps us to look to the future; to realign, refocus and reframe our church around the mission of God, around us all being first and foremost disciples and finally for none of us to remain as spectators but to walk the walk with God in this place.

Many of you have asked me directly or indirectly about a vision. We are not yet in a place to set a medium or long term vision; I want to do some of this remissioning work first, because I believe this is the tool we have been given to help us see God at work and better articulate the why, the vision of this place.

Necessarily some of this work will begin in the PCC, and I am grateful both for those who have been part of the journey to this point and those who will travel through the next 12 months. However this is not going to be a closed conversation; and when the time is right the whole congregation will be involved. In the early days much of this will be through preaching and prayer.

Please ask me regularly how it's going, hold me to account! And pray for me. This role is lonely and isolated, even with a great warden team and an energetic PCC.

Although my focus has been and will continue to be on the faith, worship and mission of the church I wanted to highlight a few other things related to the PCC.

Firstly I have encouraged the formation of a premises team. This has been a development of the old fabric committee, which has been faithfully headed up by Ian Thirlwall over many years. The time has come to broaden the remit; encouraging a group of people who have the passion and skills to hold the care and development of our buildings and ground in their hearts and heads. I look forward to the development of this group over the next year.

Secondly after the vote in General Synod to allow Prayers of Love and Faith for same sex couples as part of regular worship services the PCC had a respectful and loving discussion at our January meeting. Whilst I, as the incumbent, make final

decisions about the content and style of worship, and in this case the decision as to whether or not to use the prayers lies with me alone, I wanted to involve the PCC and receive their counsel. We took an indicative vote and unanimously agreed that if I was approached that offering the prayers would happen. As I have said in my preaching; we are called to speak well of, and to, each other, and I am more concerned with how we love all the children of God than who each of us loves. I know that not everybody in the congregation will be of the same mind as me and that is OK. I would let the congregation know if I was ever going to offer these prayers, in much the same way as I advertise baptisms, and there is a possibility that we could use these prayers to celebrate other relationships including wedding anniversaries etc. I would encourage you to come and chat to me at my monthly drop in, or give me a call if you want to discuss this with me.

Thirdly, we have kept an eye on our finances but not to the depth or detail I would like. I inherited a church without a treasurer and we still do not have one. A treasurer does not need to be on the PCC nor do they have to be a member of the church. They do not have to be an accountant or have a financial qualification. I need someone who can keep at least a quarterly eye on the accounts, and help the PCC to set budgets for areas of mission and ministry based on our income. Chipstead Parish is place of many many talented and generous people, I wonder if you know the person who will be able to serve and encourage us in this way?

Finally, our financial position is more stable than it has been in the past but underlying unrestricted funds are in negative territory by around £20k during 2023. Every single thing that happens in this church is paid for and financed from our own bank account. Every single thing that we do from turning on a light switch, to being able to have a Rector, to fundays at Netherne, or worship in the Orchard is paid for by those who use the church, those who belong to the church and those who call this place home. We receive NO outside funding from the central Church of England, The Diocese or The Government, local or national.

Which means that what you give to the church financially on a monthly basis really matters, The legacies and donations are a help, but it is you who love, worship and grow here who really make a difference whether you are giving £30 a month or £3000. If you are not giving regularly please email [finance@smchipstead.org](mailto:finance@smchipstead.org) and Deborah will tell you how to do that. If you are giving regularly thank you so much. I would not be here and this church would not be heading into recovery if it were not for you. You matter and you make a difference.

I want to end by saying that I am glad God called me here to St Margaret's, I have learnt a lot in the last 11 months, I will continue to learn every day that I am in post. I will get things wrong, I will say the wrong things, I will disappoint you, I will do things you do not like and do not agree with. I am human and broken and sinful just like you; but with the grace of God, his help and his presence I look forward to walking obediently in his way throughout the next year.

There are already signs of hope and growth, let's find our why, prune what is dead and allow god to make the boat seaworthy. It's going to be a busy year, but an exciting one, so let's hit the ground kneeling, (as Archbishop Stephen Cottrell puts it), pray, praise and pursue Gods way for us.

With every blessing, Hannah