

Thank You



I am writing to say **Thank You** to you, to everyone who supports the work of our five Churches across the Benefice. The work of the Church is sometimes taken for granted, standing alongside those in the hour of need at bereavement for a loved one recently lost; celebrating the arrival of a new member of the family at a Christening; sharing in the hopes and dreams of a couple pledging themselves to each other in Holy Matrimony. It is easy to assume that the local Church, that has been there for generations, will simply continue to be there. The truth is that the Church continues to be there because local people give generously of their time, energy and money. Without this trinity of giving the Church would cease to be. So, **Thank You** in whatever way you lend your support. It is because of you that pastoral care is made available to those in need, our ancient buildings continue to inspire and give sanctuary to many, both near and far, and we, as a 'Living Church' are able to be the community hub used and appreciated by those looking for a spiritual home.

A special Thank You to everyone who volunteers in whatever capacity to ensure that we are able to continue to offer worship in all of our Churches. **Thank You** in particular to those who have committed themselves to serving on our Parochial Church Councils for the next year. We are blessed with a number of hardworking Churchwardens, Treasurers and PCC Secretaries who deal with a myriad of tasks and mountains of paperwork between them. Welcome to Clare Wood, Churchwarden at St Peter's, Benington and Christopher Evans who has joined the PCC at St Lawrence's, Ardeley.

Quite rightly, Safeguarding is a top priority for all of our Churches. This year, safeguarding training has become mandatory for all PCC Members. This training is an important step in raising awareness about the different kinds of abuse that, sadly, continues to impact upon the lives of so many. We are all vulnerable at times - financial scams are but one example of this - so, **Thank You** to PCC Members for undergoing this training and for helping us all to remain vigilant. **Thank You** to Beverley Harlow – Parish Safeguarding Officer at St Mary's, Walkern and to Rachel Hurst, Parish Safeguarding Officer at St Lawrence's, Ardeley for taking on these roles. I am the main point of contact for St Peter's, Benington, Cottered and Throcking Churches, for anyone with a safeguarding concern. A big **Thank You** to Wendy Waygood who has stepped back as safeguarding officer at St Lawrence's after having served in this role for a number of years. Contact details for safeguarding officers are available on our websites and in all Church porches.

Welcome to Kim Horton who steps into the shoes of Heather Ferguson as Benefice Administrator. Kim brings to the role a wealth of business and administration experience and it is very good to have her onboard. Heather has been an outstanding administrator and we wish her well as she finally, finally retires!

On the 16th of June, at St Mary's, I was licensed as Rector of the Benefice by Bishop Jane, Bishop of Hertford. It was an opportunity for everyone from across the villages to come together. So many people contributed to the occasion, not least, musically. **Thank You** to the Benefice Choir for an amazing rendition of '*All people that on earth do dwell*', to Mike Stevens for being so masterly at the pipe organ, and to the Three Schools Choir – Ardeley, Benington & Walkern Primary Schools – for warming everyone's heart with, '*One and a million*'. This was the first time that the schools had worked together, and we hope there will be more opportunities in the future to do so again. One or two folks have asked what the difference is between a priest-in-charge and a rector? Not a lot is the answer! What it does mean is that there are no plans for the foreseeable future for reorganisation, in other words, our five Churches will continue to work as a unit without fear of more churches being added to the Benefice. A relief for everyone!

One project that has been brought to fruition in these past six months has been to see Holy Trinity Church at Throcking opened at weekends. The Church was occasionally opened in the past but very rarely in more recent years. The Church is an ecclesiastical gem with stunning memorials by Joseph Nollekens of Westminster Abbey fame and well worth a visit. It is hoped that all of our Churches will be open at weekends in the not too distant future. This is dependent upon volunteers willing to open and lock-up and keep an occasional eye.

This year two people from the Benefice were Confirmed on Holy Saturday in St Albans Cathedral. Congratulations to Abigail Moffat - Benington Primary School - and Alison Galer-Warren – St Mary's, Walkern. This was the first year that Confirmation was offered to one of our schools and it is hoped to repeat this next year. All Year Six children are eligible. This year also saw a number of parents being Christened with their children. This is a new trend in which adults who weren't Christened as babies have asked if they could be Christened too? Yes! Just ask.

Finances continue to be stretched across all of our Churches. There are three strands of expenditure: day-to-day running costs e.g. electricity, communion wine, candles; building and churchyard maintenance – this includes everything from architects' reports, repair to ancient stonework and removal of dead trees; the cost of a vicar – including housing, ongoing training and the running of the Diocese. Neither component in the equation comes cheap, unfortunately. At the present time the post of Rector is currently being subsidised by the Diocese – a mix of support from other Churches and Diocesan resources e.g. glebe and investment income. A big **T**hank **Y**ou to all our regular donors who give so generously. If you would like to make a financial contribution to the work of your local Parish Church – either as part of a regular pattern e.g. £5 a month or make a one-off donation, please be in touch with either myself, a Churchwarden or Church Treasurer. Our Parish Churches are here for all of us and their care and the ministry they provide is a shared responsibility. **T**hank **Y**ou.

Looking ahead, plans are progressing with the design of oak cabinets for the chapel at St Peter's along with works to drains under the chapel. The quinquennial report by the architect for St Lawrence's has been received – much to ponder. It is hoped a brass plaque in memory of Neville Chuck, organist for 70 years at Cottered Church, will soon be in place.

And there will be Harvest. **A**nd there will be Christmas. Watch this space!

If you think the Church can be of any help to you, don't hesitate to be in touch!

God Bless, Mark

(Photo of the 'new' Rector, Licensed by Bishop Jane, Bishop of Hertford with colleagues)