

## Rector's Speech at APCM 2019

### Cover Slide

I made a number of thank yous in my Rectors report for 2019. But a particular personal one from Lucy and I: We have **so** enjoyed this first year as Rector. Thank you for your encouragement; thank you for your hospitality. This Valley really is a wonderful place; a fantastic community to be part of; we really enjoy being with you all.

The Rector's report in the Annual Report looks to the past year. But now, we need to look to the **future**.

### Slide 2

Who wants there to be a church here in 20 years time?

Remember many of us will be dead within 20 years.

Who wants a legacy for our children and grandchildren of a church in these villages in 20 years time....hands up?

Because the answer to this question does make a difference as to how we decide things now.

We face a serious challenge in the rural church in England. The number of stipendiary clergy in England is in decline from 9000 to 7000 since 2000. The trend likely to continue. A quarter of stipendiary clergy are over sixty and the average age of all clergy (including non stipendiaries like me) is over 60.

The number of clergy being made available by the Church of England for rural church ministry is also being reduced.

The Diocese feel that they should deploy their limited resources in areas of large population: in towns and cities, where often areas of population of 6000 or more go without a vicar at all, rather than smaller areas of population such as the smaller villages and hamlets such as ours where the population is as little as 1500.

Frankly there is less appetite for putting clergy in populations as small as ours without a very good reason for doing so.

### Slide 3

We, as a parish, have, of course, gone from hosting a full time stipendiary vicar (Andrew) and then Amanda and a full time stipendiary curate - Rebecca and then me - part time and unpaid and two LLMs, down to a post which is officially for a half time stipendiary with a house, with one LLM (although of course as you know as I am self supporting I don't receive the half time stipendiary salary but a small housing allowance).

Its a colossal reduction in paid staff. This has meant that we have **had** to reduce the number of services we hold over the combined parish to two per Sunday.

I know its not what everyone wants, but it is essential, I'm afraid.

When we have different interest groups in church, we need to be careful to think of the other groups who worship with us and not just ourselves as this little video will I think demonstrate...

### Me Church video

It is wonderful how so many of you have been so willing to worship in churches other than the ones in your villages and even to come to services which are not your preferred style. Its very self sacrificial.

I mentioned Mark Stent in particular in the Annual Report, who at 90 attends all our services when he can get there, regardless of which church or which type, although he prefers the traditional.

Thank you to all of you who do this.

But over the next 10 years or so the pressure on reducing clergy numbers even more...will just get greater and greater

### **Slide 5**

The danger is that we may ultimately be asked to **merge** with the church in Alresford; perhaps to form a single parish with them.

If that happens clergy would be sent out from Alresford whose priorities would be set by the larger whole rather than the particular needs and characteristics of the Itchen Valley.

Do you remember these guys:

### **Slide 6**

Two models of ministry: Dixon of Dock Green who lives in the community and knows everyone in the community. He can deal with crime in the community because he knows who will have committed it because he knows them. Or Z Cars who sit waiting for something to happen and then drive in, strangers in uniform. It's a bit like that with ministry. Are you the person that is known in the community and trusted or are you a stranger who comes in from time to time to conduct services but otherwise is absent.

### **Slide 7**

But my sense is that we **can** avoid this by taking four steps now before it is too late

Firstly, by **being good at what is regulated**

By making sure that we are very professional about discharging our legal obligations on what is regulated: safeguarding, finance, Data Protection, Insurance, Health and Safety, Buildings and planning permissions (faculties etc) and Food Hygiene Standards etc and by following canon law: to show that we can cope by ourselves without some other body managing things over us.

I think we are doing well at this. Thank you to all who give your time to ensuring that we can do this.

Secondly, by **paying our contribution to the Common Mission fund** in full and on time.

We desperately need to be able to cover all our regular expenditure from our regular giving - if you have not already please don't leave this evening without first signing up to the Parish Giving Scheme if you have not already. There are forms at the back

Thirdly, by **good public relations** – being relentlessly positive to the Diocese and to others about what is happening here – by bringing problems to me or to the church wardens and not complaining to the Bishops or Diocesan officers, either in person or by email

I promise I will try to deal with problems that are identified

Fourthly, most importantly, **by the church growing** and growing significantly.

## Slide 8

The Church of England has done some studies of churches which are growing and has identified eight characteristics of growing churches.

Growing churches are those:

with a clear sense of **mission and purpose**

which actively engage with **local context**

which are willing to **change and adapt**

which have a **welcoming** culture

(please don't say to people who come to our church who live outside the Parish 'why don't you worship in your own church....?' just be happy that they are joining us. And if you see someone come in who you know is an atheist and who you don't get on with very well please don't say 'I never expected to see you here...!' Welcome is very important)

which are **innovating, envisioning and motivating**

(I am keen to have any new ideas on what we should do as long as you are not saying to me 'Alex why don't **you** do x?' A better approach is 'I think we should do x and I am willing to lead it')

which have **lay people** (as well as clergy) **in leadership**

(the church is what remains when the clergy have left....so we need to adopt a culture of lay people running the church so that whatever ministry we are doing survives the turnover of clergy)

which engage with **children and young people**; and

which **nurture disciples**

PAUSE

## Slide 9

Now the PCC and ministry team leaders spent a whole day discussing these issues a few weeks ago and the recommendations from that meeting will form our parish Mission Action Plan which we are in the course of putting together.

But there is something that **you** can do to help us. And **please** do help.

If we are to grow, **each of us** need to take action ourselves.....

The **e-word**.....evangelism! But it is not as scary embarrassing or difficult as you may think.

It is quite clear from scripture that churches can **only** grow, people **only** come to faith in Jesus by a work of the Holy Spirit.

So this takes the pressure off us: no initiating of embarrassing conversations with neighbours who we have known for ever...

Its not up to us to persuade people that they should become Christians because however clever we are in what we say....its the heart which needs transforming first and then the brain.

Although logic may have an effect on what we believe to be true, and may have an effect on our reason, our brain, it has diddley-squat impact on the heart.

So what do we do?

I would like to propose something that each of us can easily do with the minimum of embarrassment; with **no** impact on our relationships with our neighbours and yet make a colossal change in this church, in this community now and in the future.

I would like you to agree to **pray** daily every day until Pentecost Sunday 9th June for five specific people who live in the parish that you know, who are not church goers, who are not followers of Christ, that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts and that they will start to engage with God and will start to worship with us.

It doesn't matter how difficult this might appear. Think of even the most atheistic of your neighbours...think of someone who really could not care less if there was a church here in 20 years time.

### **Slide 10**

I am going to give you a book mark with space to write five names down on it. Please use this bookmark in your book for reading whenever you do that during the day, perhaps just before you go to bed.

Or if you read only on an iPad, I will give you a leather strap, to go round your wrist, tie five knots in it to remind you to pray for those five people and pray for those five individuals every day....

And then wait and see what happens...see what God does...see how the Holy Spirit moves

### **Slide 11**

If then, when they speak to you, at any time after you have started praying and make some sort of comment about faith, life and everything or about Jesus or the church or ask you a question about one of these things, then the key is to respond with gentleness and respect, as it says in 1 Peter 3:15

### **Slide 12**

But encourage them to 'come and see'; to come to our Evensong service at 6pm on Pentecost Sunday which is Sunday 9th June when we will be having the Itchen Valley Parish Choir singing and will be a wonderful evening at St Swithun's Martyr Worthy.

I will give a talk at that service on why it is reasonable, why it is rational and not drunken....to believe in Jesus Christ and to spend your life in following him

My hope and expectation is that we will have a full church at Pentecost and that the Holy Spirit will, as you pray for your neighbours, open their hearts and you will have an opportunity to invite them to join us.

Please do let me know how you get on....and we will together build something which will be thriving and still growing in twenty years time and our neighbours lives will be transformed

### **Slide 13**

Amen

