

Churchwarden's report April 2024

Have you noticed any differences in the last 12 months?

From one perspective there have been some massive changes – Rev Chris retired last summer, closely followed by our curate Josh Thorne when he moved to Northampton. Then Lizzie felt that God was calling her to move to Lymington in February, together with her husband Mikey who was leading the Youth Band.

But have you noticed any significant difference? Of course we miss those that have left for pastures new, but Whitefriars has continued to do well, despite losing our leaders - and this is due to the magnificent effort of our remaining staff and a whole host of volunteers who continue to step up and do their best to keep the church operating and moving forward.

There are too many people to thank individually, but I would personally like to thank everyone who turn up faithfully and make Whitefriars the best church in town that also has an impact in the local community and schools. There is one person I will mention, however, and that is Melvyn. He carries out some of the tasks normally done by the churchwardens and I am not sure how I would have survived without him.

The guys that I bring from Recovery House are very positive about coming to Whitefriars because you are very welcoming and friendly - and it has been lovely to see 3 of them continue on their faith journey this year, despite being free to not go to church. You should all be proud of yourselves, so keep on looking out for newcomers. There is a distinct possibility that we may get some teenagers and their parents because of the Illuminate outreach events recently. At the time of writing, 322 children have done the 3 steps of faith on the AAA pass and 86 have booked a ticket for the AAA series. These potential newcomers may be people that do not know how we behave in church, what language we use, or our normal procedures – so please continue to be welcoming, friendly and gracious towards them.

One of Chris Youngman's major priorities was that we become disciples of Christ who make other disciples. He also said that all our small groups should put as much emphasis on outreach as we do our relationships with God and each other. How are we doing with that? Are we still asking the 2 Discipleship Questions, or has your group regressed into its comfort zone of doing bible studies with no outward focus? If you are not a member of a Discipleship group, please consider joining one so that we can all consider some important spiritual issues facing the church.

After a lot of work by the PCC on the Parish Profile and adverts for our vicar's post it was disappointing that there were no applicants. There does seem to be a shortage of vicars across the country, and it seems that Evangelicals in particular, are reluctant to move currently because of the controversial proposals coming out of General Synod. All the recent local vacancies for incumbents have taken a considerable time to fill, so maybe I shouldn't have been surprised. I see this as a test of our faith but am convinced that God will bring the right person to us if we pray and remain faithful.

There was some discontent from a few people about some of the words in the Parish Profile. The PCC has listened to this and made a few changes to the profile and an advert, but we are aware that we cannot please all of the people, all of the time. Some others have been upset because we have made the changes. Remember that the PCC are elected by you to use our best judgement, rather than to carry out a referendum every time we need to make decisions about the church. At the end of the day I want to please God, not please people, when there is a conflict of interests.

Looking forward, the vicar's post will continue to be advertised until Ally Gibson and I feel we have a suitable candidate that is willing to come and lead us. Also, the new Bishop of Peterborough, Rt Rev Debbie Sellin, has offered to come to preach at Whitefriars in July this year.

Please take every opportunity to continue to pray for our church – both locally for God's choice of a new leader and that we can continue to glorify God through our witness in the community - and for God's church in England generally that we get strong leadership in accordance with God's wishes.