

VICAR'S PASTORAL REPORT
2008 Annual Parochial Church Meeting ("APCM")

A big thank you to all those who have put together the reports. A notable feature of the year was the introduction in January 2008 of a new informal service on Sunday mornings at 11.30am and moving the 10.30 half and hour earlier to 10.00 am. There will be a review in July, but early signs are positive with attendance at the informal averaging around 50 adults each week and attendance each week at the 10.00am service at well above 100 adults. Easter Day attendance this year saw record numbers in recent years for the combined morning services. I remain hopeful that this step of faith will in time grow the church membership significantly.

We welcomed Louise Ellis as our new training curate, together with her husband, Nick, and children Jessica and James. Louise has brought so much to the church already, including publishing new welcome literature and organising a welcome team and editing our Christmas Contact leaflet and a new Newsletter. She is a joy to work with. I want to thank those who led our worship and preached: the clergy - Louise Ellis and David Huntley; the Readers - Michael Eldridge, Colin Chatten and Pippa Goldring; new preachers coming through - David Downs, Daniel Salliss and Tim Redding; those who lead worship in the evenings - Gillian Perrins and Norma Schofield; and those who lead the informal morning service - David Downs, Paul Harwood, Paul Nicholas and Alex Shuttleworth.

It has been very encouraging to see Pippa Goldring and Alex Shuttleworth both recommended for training for ordained stipendiary ministry. We have also approved Regina Chitambar and David Downs to go forward and train as Readers. We are also looking forward to Marion Padgham being commissioned as a Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary ('SPA') on 16 June. Stella Brazier reached 80 during the year. She has been a Reader for 20 years, 11 of those at St. Mary's. She has decided to worship at St. Matthews and continue with her ministry there, although we will see her around I am sure, no less with the Mother's Union. I want to thank Stella on behalf of everyone for all her many years of service to God in this parish. This included Barrington Lodge which this Summer moves to new premises in St. James Rd. I also want to offer a special note of thanks to Paul Whybrow who has helped with monthly services run by St. Mary's since it opened in Morland Road in the mid-eighties and is now standing down.

The Life Groups are generally in good heart. A note of thanks to all Life Group Leaders and also to the Group Pastors for the invaluable job they do: Paul Harwood, Penny Smee; Jackie Staniforth and Tony Fisher, who took up this role during the year. We remain committed to the idea of 'cell' working alongside the weekly worship gathering to enable us to grow spiritually and to be supported and encouraged in the faith. We have also just finished another successful Alpha course. I want to thank Chris Rutter, who capably led the course again, and all those who helped make it go so well. Chris is now handing over the leadership after completing three successful courses and I want to thank him for all he has achieved.

During the year since the last APCM, we baptised 38 children and 5 adults (3 by full-immersion) with 3 affirmations of faith by full-immersion and 1 thanksgiving for the gift of a child. Our Confirmation service conducted by the Bishop of Croydon, Nick Baines, together with other churches in the Central Croydon Deanery saw 13 of our candidates being confirmed, of which 6 were young people. We had 9 marriages and one blessing last year. We took 18 funerals last year, including 4 conducted in church (including Daphne Henson, John Campbell and Gerry Crumbie).

I want to thank all those who taught and helped out in the children's and youth ministry, and especially Pippa Goldring as Junior Church Co-ordinator, who is standing down this year after superbly leading the Junior Church over the last five years. A special thank you also to all those who stood down from leading and helping in Junior Church, including Regina Chitambar, Lizzie Goldring, Yvonne Hoile, Jackie Justin, Lois Leeming, Emma Lespierre, Laura Payne and Sylvia Sinclair. Our Oasis Youth-worker, Francis Johnson-Beke has grown from strength to strength and the young people's work has continued to flourish under his ministry. It has been good to see many new leaders in JPs and Senior Pathfinders and also a Youth Alpha being held during the year. Thank you to Dan Salliss who stood down during the year from leading JPs. There were two superb 'Worship Nights', which drew a wide audience of young people. We had another successful Summer Holiday Club with the relevant and challenging theme 'Waste Watchers', with special thanks going to Val and Becca Rolfe and their team.

We developed links with Christ Church Methodist concerning working more closely in worship, mission and use of our facilities. Rachel Deigh and I are also working as joint leaders on a fresh expression of church in the heart of Croydon aimed at those who do not go to church, principally in the 18-35 age bracket. This is supported by the Anglican Central

Croydon Deanery and the Croydon Methodist Circuit. It will start up with a formative team meeting in May 2008.

The Magdalene Pre-School has continued to go from strength to strength under the Management of Lorraine Wade, assisted by Anne Foroozandeh. During the year, it received an outstanding report from Early Education and Childcare at the highest Level 1. The Parent and 0-5 Club on Wednesday afternoons continues to flourish and play an important outreach ministry.

We had preaching series entitled: 'The One True Gospel' (based on Galatians); 'What is God calling me to do?'; 'True Homeland'; 'A Man after God's Heart' (based on 2 Samuel 1-5); 'God at Work'; and 'Resurrection People'. We also had a series entitled 'That's just not PC' at The Informal in the evenings in Autumn 2007. At the All-age Service, we had series on looking at 'The Senses' (based on the miracles of Christ); and 'People who met Jesus'. In the Common Worship evening services, we now follow the lectionary. We have persevered with the Dynamic Prayer Meeting on the Monday night after the fourth Sunday in the month, which is foundational to our mission and ministry and has undergirded a sense of God's leading on several new initiatives, such as the fresh expression in central Croydon and the tower development.

The music in our worship continues to flourish, especially at the major festivals during the year, when our worship is quite wonderful. The informal band especially has come on leaps and bounds since we started a weekly informal in the mornings and the leading of worship is first rate. The fruit of their labours is borne out in the growing congregation at the 11.30am service. Thanks to Val and Louise that oversee the band, Chris Johnson who oversees the Choir, and Hilary Gee who oversees the Music Group.

The Pastoral Team continues to play a significant role in supporting the parish. I particularly want to thank our three SPAs, Sharon Wallace, Norma Schofield and Gillian Perrins for all their hard work, and Michael Eldridge and David Huntley for supporting the clergy in taking funerals. There is always a lot going on with all the other groups and organisations linked to St. Mary's and we are blessed with a flourishing Rainbow group and three lively brownie packs; all linked to the church. There was an active and varied social calendar, including a Quiz night, another Barn Dance and the now annual Vicarage Garden Party.

Thank you to all those who served on the PCC and its sub-groups and especially to Rachel Stead and Becca Rolfe whose resign this year from PCC and for those who have faithfully served as our representatives on Deanery Synod whose term of office is now up: Michael Buckley, Mary Chandler, Michael Perrins and Eileen Weaver. During the year the Fair-trade and Environment Advisory Group brought forward proposals for Fair Trade and the Environment. A Report on Racial Inclusivity and Diversity was also produced by a PCC sub-committee chaired by Dunstan Wilkins. It is an excellent report which has far reaching recommendations and which will be a challenge for all of us in implementing.

As far as Mission in the Wider World, we had a reasonably successful Missions Gift Day, although we did not quite reach our target this year. We reviewed the missionary organisations that we support and decided to adopt Open Doors and drop CPAS. Thanks to Michael Perrins and the Missionary Committee.

Julia Keep has done a splendid job again as our Treasurer. It was a challenging year, which saw a substantial deficit. This was largely due to some significant capital expenditure and to an increased parish quota. It was encouraging, however, that our giving levels were maintained, although income from the parish offices has declined sharply, as has income from hiring out our facilities. All this means a very tight budget for 2008. Thank you too to all those who gave so generously.

A big thanks to the Shared Leadership Team and especially to the Wardens for their relentless energy, support and encouragement. I also want to thank all the staff, especially those on the office for their tireless support: Ursula Owen, Karen Payne and Val Rolfe. On behalf of everyone, I want to finish by thanking Ursula Owen, who has retired this year at 60, for her 28 years of faithful service as Parish Secretary.

The risen Christ said to Mary Magdalene, "Why are weeping? Who are you seeking?". On seeing the risen Christ, she bore witness to the resurrection with the message, "I have seen the Lord. He is Risen". May we be encouraged afresh to live in hope as 'Resurrection People'.

Rev Richard Williams, Vicar
6 April 2008