**Vicar’s Report to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

**for the Year 2015**.

I offer to you my report as the Vicar of the Parish of Christ the King, Meltham for the year 2015. What a year it was, very busy, very emotional and very fruitful.

Let me outline the business of 2015. Meltham continues to be a unique place, packed throughout the year with community events. The Scarecrow Festival and Meltham Memories are now firmly fixed in the annual diary, along with Civic Sunday, Remembrance Sunday and all the community services at Christmas. Our first Carols in the Inn filled the Waggon & Horses with sounds of Christmas. I feel very privileged to lead a Parish where the Church is so highly respected by those who live and work within it. The number of people who came to Carols in the Park was too great to count. St Bartholomew’s was packed for the carol singing and Christmas Lights Switch-on, and not many of those there would I class as regular Anglican worshippers.

I’m sure our hard work of building relationships with the three Primary Schools helps with our joint ventures. At this point I offer my thanks to all those who freely give of their time to be in our schools as volunteers, or as Governors. It is good that we have the opportunity to reveal our Christian faith in words and actions.

I think the respect for the Church in Meltham is also shown through the many, many funerals taken by your clergy during 2015. Nationally, civil celebrants are leading funerals more than ever before. This is not the case in Meltham. The fees I sent to the Diocese during the summer and autumn months were three times more than those sent for the same months in the previous year.

I certainly could not manage without the help of Peter, Dennis, John and Judy and I continually thank God for their support and commitment to the Parish. Due to their age Peter, John and Judy now hold what’s known as the Bishop’s ‘Permission to Officiate Certificate’ and, although they have reduced their personal workloads, I know I can rely on them if I need to.

Dennis continues as a Non-Stipendiary Priest (that means he doesn’t get paid). In 2015 he continued with his studies towards a Master’s Degree in Theology which he hopes to complete this year. His major research has been around the area of “Spirituality within those who have Dementia”. His work will certainly be of use to us in the coming year as we work alongside Kirklees and those on the Town Council who hope to make Meltham a Dementia Friendly community.

Mandy Aspland, one of our Readers, also worked very hard last year with her studies around “Messy Church”. I hope all her hard work will be recognised as she accepts her Doctorate later this year. I am so lucky to have a dedicated group of Readers, as well as Clergy, all having gifts, skills and talents in different areas which complement one another.

I am also blessed with a Pastoral Team of volunteers who continually consider the needs of those in the four churches and those who have communion at home, or in our care homes who might need extra support through a chat or a personal visit. There are so many dedicated people within the Parish who recognise what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, a servant of God.

So, why was 2015 a very emotional year? Seventeen years ago I was ordained by the Bishop of Manchester, and there is nothing like an ordination of someone special to take me back to that most incredible day. Many of us were at Huddersfield Parish Church to witness Charlene’s ordination to the Priesthood. Turning her stole from that of deacon to priest brought tears to my eyes and a lump to my throat. The following day was also so special as Charlene presided in the Parish for the first time, a moment that I know she will remember for the whole of her life, I thank everybody who helped with the refreshments that followed the service.

I cannot give this report without mentioning the personal devastation I felt with the diagnosis of my sister’s cancer. I thank everybody, but in particular Charlene, who took over my diary so that I could spend quality time with Susan. Her death came sooner than even the consultant expected. I thank you all for your prayerful support before and after her death. Losing three members of our family within a few months was very difficult for John and me, but with your help we’re coping.

In the Parish since January 2015 up until today we have also mourned the deaths of Shirley Watson, Dorothy Ashton and Bill Miller, who all worshipped at Christ Church, Rose Bastow at St James, Kathy Holmes at St Bartholomew’s and Louise Brook from St Mary’s. We pray for them and for those who miss them

2015 saw the fruition of all the planning towards our pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Dennis and I took twenty-two people with us to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. The troubles across the Middle East meant some people felt the need to withdraw, but, thankfully, whilst we were there we saw no trouble at all and everybody had a fabulous time. There were too many highlights to tell you here, but in time we may have a “Holy Land” evening for everybody to see what we got up to.

So, I move on to what was “fruitful” in 2015? I’ll begin with all that we’ve learnt, shared and experienced through Charlene’s work as Curate. We are truly blessed to have her with us. I love her very much and watching her develop day by day reminds me of my own curacy in Oldham all those years ago. She is so like me, or me as I was. Her vitality has made me realise that although I still have my passion and drive, my energy is starting to flag and it’s taking me longer to do things, even since my arrival seven years ago! Through Charlene’s work we have a clearer sense of liturgy, a deeper response to prayer and a willingness to discuss the “bigger issues” coming from the Church of England. With Charlene we have experienced multi-sensory stations of the Cross, we’ve had the opportunity to be still and quiet through Advent meditations. We helped to house Mary and Joseph as they made a diversion through Meltham on their way to Bethlehem. We followed the transformation of the Jesse tree at St Bartholomew’s and on Facebook. , Some of you went on a pilgrimage to Walsingham, to be repeated this year. . Together Charlene and I discussed the focus for her second year. We decided that ‘children and their spiritual life’ would give the scope to strengthen links with schools, church, community and families. Charlene has made some wonderful strides forward building connections and opening discussions about the role of children in the church. Last year we began to think about the role of children in our churches, particularly around receiving holy communion before confirmation. DCC and PCC discussions have now lead us to the point of inviting diocesan representatives to guide us forward to the next stages.

At this time last year all four churches had new Church Wardens although Clive Pearson and Pat Beastow were returning to this important office in the church. Our informal monthly meetings have been supportive and informative. All seven Wardens have accepted the post again this year, but I must stress how important it is that all Officers of the church are present at Sunday worship and at DCC and PCC meetings as often as is possible. I look forward to working with you all again and please be assured you all have my support, as I know I have yours.

Two disappointments for me personally last year have been my commitment to meeting with Lay Chairs and Readers. For a number of reasons these did not happened in 2015. I certainly hope to put that right in this coming year.

All too often churches are weighed down by the negative attitude we hear and see in the national media. It’s easy to believe all that we hear! I want to take this opportunity to allay any fears within this Parish. Last year 9 young women came forward for confirmation: this means that over the last seven years 48 have made that lifelong commitment to God’s call. It would be wonderful to see them in church more regularly and perhaps that is a challenge for us in this year to come.

At the AGM last year I announced that the number on our Parish Electoral roll was 247. Since that date we have lost 9 members, 4 through death and 5 through moving away from Meltham. I am thrilled to announce that our new Electoral Roll for 2016 has had an amazing 31 additions over these last few weeks, new members in all four congregations wanting to have that sense of belonging through membership on the Electoral Roll. I’ve been asked by people in the congregations and in the community why we have had this incredible time of growth. My response is very simple …. we have been using the prayer for growth offered through the training course “Leading your Church into Growth”, otherwise known as LYCiG. Everybody can exercise this crucial ministry of praying for our church, whether we are old, young, able or infirm, each of us is able to ask God in prayer to guide and strengthen His church in this community. I ask all of you to continue with this prayer at all meetings and at the beginning of Sunday worship. Who knows what plans God has for us in this next year, but I know I’m very excited to be part of it.

So what of the next year?

We will be continuing with the LYCiG material, both at DCC and PCC meetings, producing plans for growth that every single member can be part of. We will be exploring the many vocations (for clergy and laity) within the church through Charlene’s third year focus. We will build on our popular Lent House Groups by introducing new, informal Bible Study Groups to take into account the requests I have already received. We will be running another Confirmation course as I’ve already had enquiries from about ten/twelve people. We will heighten our involvement at Meltham Memories through introducing a “Prayer Tent” that people can come into. We will strive to pay as much Common Fund as possible. I was pleased that last year we again paid more than we did the previous year, in fact we paid more than we have in the last seven years. We will continue to offer the Oasis Days at St James, the quarterly 11 o’clock communion followed by lunch at St Bartholomew’s, the baptism party, the memorial service, the service for bereaved parents, Ale Talk at the Waggon and Hoses, Men’s nights at ?Jean and Clinton’s because these are the times when we reach out to those on the fringe of the church. We offer the seed through our invitations and we ask God to bring about the growth.

An exciting year ahead, but only possible if we all play our part in bringing God’s kingdom here to Meltham, so how do we let the world outside our churches know about what’s going on? I want to encourage more people to use the website, set up superbly by Simon, with even more information being added as we have our training to help us become more proficient. I want more subscribers to the site and more interested visitors taking a look at who we are and what we stand for. We shall continue to use our noticeboards – making sure they are updated regularly. We have our magazine and our weekly news sheet advertising what’s going on in the Parish to the wider community. It’s vital that the last two are utilized. The magazine was never meant to make a profit, but it’s not going to be sustainable if it costs more to print than the revenue that we receive from it. Lots of weekly news sheets and magazines are left in churches each week and each month. We need to help our congregations to see how useful they are. I want to continue building on the “season of invitation”. Personal contact, or a card through the door, are paramount in encouraging and developing that all important sense of belonging. Lists of different groups are available, please ask! Another few challenges for next year.

My last thank you perhaps should be to John, Chris, Enid, Christine, Jackie and Ian. I’m sure it’s far from easy being a clergy spouse, I ask that you keep them all in your prayers regularly but perhaps especially this week prayers for John, as the two of us enter a new stage in our married life - that of John’s retirement which begins on Thursday night!

That concludes my report for the year 2015. My thanks to everyone here tonight for all that you do and if anyone has any questions I will try to answer them.

God bless you all.

Maureen

xxx

Maureen E. Read

Vicar of the Parish of Christ the King Meltham.