

## ST. BENE'T'S CHURCHWARDENS' REPORT – 2024

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### RECOVERING (JP)

I am reminded of, just over a year ago, a sermon preached to us here at St. Bene't's by Matt Bullimore.

It was at the very end of April; and so, soon after Anna's tragic death.

The text was John 10 – *The Good Shepherd*.

It spoke of the life on offer to us – God's gift to us through Jesus, the risen Lord; of God knowing and calling each of us by name.

Matt also drew us to St. Luke who spoke of the importance of teaching, of fellowship, of breaking bread together and of prayer; of the importance of kind and generous hearts – of being open to Jesus.

These words in scripture take us to the essence of God's love and how as Christians we can know that truth daily in our lives both individually and together.

And so it is with deep gratitude that we can thank God that we have continued to regularly meet together, that amidst our grief both individual and shared we have listened to the word of God, we have shared in the sacrament, and we have opened our hearts to God.

We are thankful also, that through the generosity of both the Diocese of Ely and James himself, we have been given an interim priest who has helped us with great wisdom, kindness and grace navigate our way steadily through the testing times of the last year.

### CONTINUING

(JP): At St. Bene't's our aim is to be a place of prayer with a hospitable welcome to all who come through our doors – we have a strong pattern of worship and an open church.

To make this a reality we are dependent on so many for so much and so thank you. For the time, talents and tithes that you all give so generously in enabling us to be the community we are, thank you.

## WORSHIP - GM

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In particular, on your behalf we want to thank all those who have led our worship here at St Bene't's over the past twelve months, and enabled our rich pattern of daily worship to continue despite the full-time ministry team being depleted during the year to just one priest: James. And this achievement is in large part due to him. He has borne the lion's share of presiding and preaching at our Sunday services with a quality of preaching that has been inspiring, so helpful and deeply thought provoking, which will long live in our memories. But he has also assiduously used his networks and his encouragement of the laity to ensure that daily Eucharists and Evening Prayer have continued to beat the rhythm of our contemplative and sacramental worship and prayer life. You have said, James, that one thing you have enjoyed about being at St Bene't's is that you have been able to focus on being our priest – and you have been just that, a superb, dedicated and loving priest. Thank you so much.

Alongside James, we are fortunate to have an equally dedicated team of people who have contributed richly to leading our worship: our retired clergy with PTO authority here, Richard and Caroline; visiting clergy colleagues from across Cambridge: Jonathan Soyars from our own congregation, Andrew Hammond, James Crockford, and of course the ever-faithful Matt Bullimore, Chaplain of Corpus right next door, who continued to play a huge part until James arrived in July and regularly supports us mid-week. Thank you to you all.

Since the last APCM we have sadly said goodbye to three priests: to Olga, to Ed and to Sophie. We thank them all and remember them with fondness and love; we wish them well as they continue to minister as priests here in Cambridge and hope to welcome them back from time to time...maybe in the last phase of our vacancy in July and August.

We owe great thanks to all the members of the congregation who enable and assist in our worship, too numerous to mention by name but you know who you are: the servers, readers, intercessors, cantors and livestream operators. A big thank you also to our Sacristan Sally-Marie Osborne and her deputy Sarra Facey for all they do – and we wish Sally-Marie well as she takes a break shortly to have her baby and adjusts with Alex and Benedict to being a family of four and even busier.

One of the good things to emerge from Covid has been the thriving Evening Prayer community which meets both in church and on-line, enabling participation from anywhere in the world and with regular attendees elsewhere in the UK and Europe. This would not be possible without those who host the service in church and operate the technology and those who lead

the worship from wherever they are. Thank you all for your dedication to these tasks.

### **SERVICE - JP**

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We are thankful to all who serve to provide welcome and hospitality at St. Bene't's.

In particular, we thank –

Those who serve as sidespeople providing a Sunday morning welcome to those that pass through our doors

Those who serve in making and serving coffee on Sunday mornings, providing refreshment and conversation

Those who serve as flower arrangers in providing additional beauty to our church

Those who serve on the social committee, coordinated by Andrea Harrison, that provide a range of events which serve to further build our sense of community

Those who serve by doing jobs around the church and keeping it tidy, especially Janice Moore who volunteers her time and energy to clean the church each week.

### **GROUPS - GM**

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There continue to be many active groups who meet for activities that complement our worship and add to our learning and formation. Special thanks for leadership of these go

To Jenny Harris and Fiona Dobson who lead the thriving 20s and 30s Group. This is a big success in our ministry to younger people, recognised not only by us but by the Bishop and others in the diocese, providing as it does a safe space where students and those setting out in work and careers can find a church home, grow their faith, find enjoyment and build friendships.

To the leaders of the children's and youth groups, especially the coordinators Rosemary and Andrea, for their dedication and commitment to the care and nurture of our young people and their families.

To James for leading two excellent Reading Groups through Advent and Lent and stimulating much helpful and thought-provoking discussion around the

Desert Fathers and Black Spirituality. And for continuing the link with LSM on deepening faith by continuing to organise our joint Saturday Study mornings.

There are two other groups focused on prayer and deepening our understanding: the Contemplative Prayer Group led by Judith Miller and Lectio Divina by Anne Kettle. Thanks to them for their initiatives with these important groups – small is often beautiful.

We thank our organist, Ralph Woodward for always being there, for his sensitive accompaniment and marvellous post-service voluntaries, for directing our talented *ad hoc* choir at Festivals and special services and, of course, for working with Nick Danks, the Director of Music at Corpus, to make the joint choirs and services with Corpus such a rich experience during last Easter Term...was it really a year ago they started?

The bellringers under Tower Captain Sam Johnson continue to ring out their peals over Cambridge every week of the year so thanks to them for their skill and continued commitment to prefacing our services and welcoming visiting bellringing teams to the home of Fabian Stedman and change ringing.

#### **ADMINISTRATION - JP**

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We are thankful to all who provide effective leadership and support to help ensure that St. Bene't's Church serves to the benefit of all –

In particular, we thank –

The PCC, our governing body, and the standing committee of the PCC, for their wisdom and commitment, serving to support the well-being of St. Bene't's Church both practically and spiritually – thank you in particular to Felicity who completed her three-year term and is stepping and down, and to Philippa, our parish administrator, for her commitment to a wide range of administrative responsibilities – we continue to be immensely grateful to her for all that she does to support our life here at St. Bene't's. Thanks also to Felicity for the voluntary assistance she gives to Philippa, especially with rotas –

We thank our deputy wardens, Andrea and Nicolas, for their help to the wardens in sharing responsibilities and providing support, both practical and spiritual –

Andrew, our safeguarding officer, for his knowledge and skills in ensuring the sound principles of safeguarding are implemented to keep all, particularly the most vulnerable, safe -

Our great thanks go to Jon Young, our Treasurer until December, for all his diligent work in keeping, simplifying and explaining our accounts so clearly, and for completing the 2023 accounts through to their submission to the independent examiner in March. And now to George Palmer, our new treasurer, who has begun the work of overseeing the financial matters of St. Bene't's and working with our new commercial bookkeepers who we have hired to keep the accounts. We thank him for taking on this important role which is key to the promotion of both the vision and implementation of God's mission here.

We are also thankful for the many, both here and close at hand and those far away, who are continuing to hold St. Bene't's in their prayers. Within this, Geoff and I would like to thank all who have held us individually in their prayers in supporting us in carrying out our role as churchwardens. We have felt very much cared for by you all.

## ONWARDS - GM

So, here today, we can look back on, and give thanks for, the year we have been through together and also look ahead. This time last year, it was only nine weeks since Anna died and it seemed a long way to when we would be welcoming in her successor as our new incumbent. Now that time is not too far off. We entered the year and the anticipated long vacancy with sadness but also with hope. Joy and I, and the PCC, adopted two main guiding principles:

- To build on Anna's legacy and the solid foundations and growth points that she had established;
- To maintain the pattern of daily worship, the quality of preaching and liturgy and our commitment to outreach and ministry to the marginalized, all of which Anna had embraced and expanded.

We did not want to stand still but we have been careful not to implement any changes that might prove a concern for our next vicar. I think you will see from what we have said so far, and what is in the reports from the different groups and committees, that we have done just that. The sadness about Anna is still there but looking back over the year we can see how much we have moved on. Much of that has been due to James's caring ministry amongst us, where he has been sensitive to what we have experienced, but gently and lovingly moved us along, challenging us to do new things and think about what lies ahead. Here has been a priest in the right place at the right time, using a sabbatical year to look after us, and James we thank you so much for that.

In what ways have we moved on? Well a good example is in our welcoming. We thought we were quite good at welcoming new people and visitors but James perceived that, with such a high throughput of people at our services, we could probably do better. So he urged us with his now famous directive to 'speak to someone you know and at least one person you do not'...with quite persistent encouragement and reminders. We think this has made a real difference, that we all know and talk to more people and that newer people more quickly feel more part of our community rather than waiting on the fringes. It's a small thing but its effect can be huge.

To have sustained the level and quality of worship with a much diminished team has been a huge achievement and, although we are still a bit stretched, we have built a stronger platform of resource on which our new vicar can call and build.

We have continued with maintain and upgrade our fabric, with hopefully our south aisle solar panels project about to start next month, after a rather tortuous period of silence from both the diocese and the city planning department to give the necessary approvals. This will be a major contribution to our sustainability credentials and support the work of our Eco-Church Group which has been re-kindled with much enthusiasm and about which you will hear far more in the coming months.

However, probably the most valuable and lasting project we have worked on this last year has been the writing of the Parish Profile. We decided to get input from the whole congregation, including the children's and youth groups, to try to make sure the Profile represented the whole diversity of the congregation and our worship, ministry and outreach in their widest sense. There was an intense PCC awayday, questionnaires, after-service discussion groups and a lot of writing, debate and iteration before we arrived at our final document. We would like to thank you all, especially the PCC, for all your input and insight. We want to thank Andrew Welchman in particular for his thoughtful crafting of certain sections of the document and general guidance. As well as attracting a strong list of candidates and making them well informed about who we are and where we think we might go, we think there are at least two other benefits:

- A slightly edited version can be used as a good introduction to St Bene't's for new people, informing them efficiently about a lot of things which it may take them months or years to find out by just being here;
- And hopefully it was a very helpful exercise for us all as a congregation, to talk to each other about what being part of St Bene't's means, as part

of our collective grieving process and seeing a hopeful future with the possibility of new directions.

So, having the Profile, we went into the process of advertising for a new vicar and then the discernment process to determine who, from the strong list of applicants, God has chosen to be our next priest. We should thank +Dagmar, Alex Hughes our Archdeacon, Andrew Davison, Philippa Hoskins and Matt Bullimore from Corpus, our Patron, and the Master Christopher Kelly, who all provided tremendous support and insight throughout this process.

We ended up with four very strong candidates for interview, who the PCC and the ministry team met at a familiarization day the day before. As the interview process proceeded, one person emerged and rose above the others, whose quality as a priest, spirituality, view of life and personality we felt all resonate with St Bene't's. This was Devin McLachlan.

We said last year that we needed to reach the point where we were ready for someone who was not Anna and would probably be very different, whilst embracing all that St Bene't's is and stands for. We believe that in Devin we have found that person, someone who will preserve all that is good and which we cherish but not be afraid to lead us in new directions and sometimes out of our comfort zone.

Amongst the gifts he will bring are:

- Expertise in multi-faith understanding and cooperation
- A deep concern about racial equality and broadening our thinking on inclusivity and diversity
- As an Episcopalian the background to help us think more clearly about the true cost of ministry and to fish deeper in the huge pool of talent and experience which is this congregation
- Engaging and insightful preaching which will continue the tradition of mature teaching and challenge from the St Bene't's pulpit; to give you a taster of what is to come, we will place on the website the Thought for the Day homily with which Devin began his interview...it is intriguingly entitled 'The Internet of God'.

So where might we be going, guided by our new vicar?

- Thinking about our stewardship of God's world, turning our aspiration to be an Eco-Church into a practical reality
- Exploring whether joining the Inclusive Church movement is the right thing to do

- Thinking about what outreach means for us and what St Bene't's has distinctively to offer others in influencing Christian thinking and practice
- Practically, installing an accessible toilet facility and making best use of the organ/kitchen area
- Hopefully resuming being a training parish, benefiting again from the active presence of ordinands
- And underpinning all this we will pick up on re-visiting our Development Action Plan to decide on our priorities and turn our thinking into action for the future.

If you are watching online Devin, we are delighted that you have felt called to be our priest and very much look forward to you joining us, to your ministry amongst us and a future full of hope. Devin and his family (his wife is a Fellow of Pembroke College and they have teenage twins) are currently out in SE Asia where his wife Iza is spending a sabbatical. He will be instituted and inducted on the evening of Friday 13 September by the Archdeacon, so please book the date in your diaries.

Meanwhile, James will be with us until Sunday 14 July, when we will be able to say farewell and thank him more fully on our Patronal Festival with a garden party lunch – details to follow. That will give us two more months of vacancy to look after ourselves, with help from some of the nearby friends that have supported us over the past year or so, and to make sure that we are ready to welcome Devin in September.

In doing so, we pray for God's grace as we look towards the year ahead, secure in the knowledge that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.