##### st. bene’t’s churchwardens report APCM May 14th 2023

## *Beginning*

We begin this churchwarden’s report by reflecting back on the year that has been and on our extreme sadness that it is not Anna, our vicar and our friend, who is standing here now.

As individuals and as the church community of St. Bene’t’s, we have suffered both a significant shock and are suffering an enormous grief following the tragic death of Anna on Wednesday 8th March.

Time appears transient as we remember so clearly Anna with us in a multiplicity of ways; ways in which our recollections give rich witness to Anna’s life as a priest here with us.

And so we begin this churchwarden’s report by remembering Anna and thanking God for Anna.

In the words of Mark Oakley who preached such a powerfully resonant sermon on our first Sunday without Anna –

*We thank God for Anna – for her will to do the will of him who sent her…for her spiritual life as a priest and as a person…for her duty and attention to both ministry and friendships…and for that ministry and for those friendships that were her God given gift to our lives…*

## *Emerging*

Our website says:

*All are welcome at St. Bene’t’s, from the very young to the very elderly, and everyone in between.*

To make this welcome a reality, we live together as a church community, with many giving so much and so kindly with their talents, time and money.

The generosity of each of you helps us in our desire to be the body of Christ here in this place – so thank you all for all you do.

###### *WORSHIP*

*In particular, on your behalf we would like to thank all those who lead and enable our worship here at St Bene’t’s:*

Our clergy colleagues, without whom the daily Eucharist would not be possible, and whose preaching contributes so much richness and wisdom, especially Ed, Olga, Sophie and Richard as well as Matt Bullimore, Jonathan Soyars, Andrew Hammond. James Crockford and Philip Murray.

Our ordinands Hannah and Mary, to whom we offer love and prayers for their upcoming ordination as deacons – we will miss you both

All those who take part in services: to the servers, readers, intercessors, cantors and livestreamers.

Those who lead and host our daily Evening Prayer, in church and online.

Sally-Marie for all she does behind the scenes and for covering the sacristan duties post-Covid.

###### *Service*

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, including Andrea Harrison, that provide a range of events that serve to further build our sense of community

###### *GROUPS*

There are many active groups who meet for activities that complement our worship. Special thanks go

To Sally-Marie and to Shanti, and to their Chaplain Ed, for the ongoing care and creativity that goes into sustaining and supporting the 20s and 30s group, and maintaining it as a space where younger people, some new to St Bene’t’s, can find a home, and where friendships and faith can be built.

To the leaders of the children’s and young people’s groups, especially Rosemary and Andrea, representing a commitment and care for the children, young people and their families.

To the leaders of the Credo course for teaching and nurturing those growing their faith and in particular to Ed and Hannah as well as Anne Strauss, the Chaplain at Trinity who has stepped in to help complete this year’s course prior to the confirmation service.

To Ed and Olga for guiding the weekly Reading Groups and to Judith Miller for hosting the Contemplative Prayer group.

To our organist, Ralph Woodward for always being there and directing our ad hoc choir who sing so beautifully on special occasions.

To the Bellringers under Tower Captain Sam Johnson, for their skill and sustained commitment to prefacing our services and marking special occasions with peals at the birthplace of change ringing, especially to mark Anna’s funeral and the Coronation.

###### *Administration*

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, for their wisdom and commitment, who serve to support the well-being of St. Bene’t’s Church both practically and spiritually – thank you in particular to those who are stepping down either because they have completed their three-year term or are leaving Cambridge soon: Neil Petersen, Andrew Welchman, Eleanor Peers, Shanti Daffern, Gavin Koh and Sam Fitzgerald

Philippa, our administrator, for her commitment to a wide range of administrative responsibilities – we are particularly aware of the additional burden placed on her in more recent times and we continue to be immensely grateful to her for all that she does to support our life here at St. Bene’t’s –

Katherine Stevenson, our former Communications Officer, and to Felix Blake, our current Communications Officer for keeping things up to date and accessible on the church website and preparing special posters -

We thank our deputy wardens, Andrea and Nicolas, for their help to the wardens in sharing responsibilities in 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 -

And finally, thank you to Jon, our treasurer, who has worked diligently in overseeing the financial matters of St. Bene’t’s in order to promote 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

## *developing*

Having reflected on the past year, we ought perhaps look at the year ahead of us. We are now in a vacancy of course. In some ways we should be careful not to do too much that is new, so as not to do anything that may be a concern for our next vicar. However, neither should we just stand still – Alex Hughes the Archdeacon has been at pains to reassure us that we can continue with plans in the pipeline as long as these are in the long-term interests of the ministry of St Bene’t’s and its congregation.

Joy and I, and the PCC, are adopting two main guiding principles:

- To honour Anna’s legacy and to continue to build where we can on the solid foundations and growth points that she so lovingly established;

- To maintain the pattern of daily service provision, the quality of preaching and liturgy, and our commitment to outreach and ministry to the marginalised, all of which she embraced and expanded. We do this not only because these are part of St Bene’t’s DNA but also so that we can attract candidates of the very highest calibre to be our next incumbent.

You will be curious, I am sure, about how we get to that point. I will tell you as much as I can.

- It would have been difficult to follow Anna as vicar here, even if she had moved on in normal circumstances. Given what has happened, becoming our next vicar will be even more challenging.

- To enable us as a congregation and a community to move on from Anna’s tragic death, we need to have quite a lengthy interregnum, for us to come to terms with what has happened and to be in a position to accept that whoever follows Anna will not be Anna and will probably be very different, whilst embracing all that St Bene’t’s is and stands for.

- So we do not expect to have a new incumbent in place before Autumn 2024.

- That is a long time not to have anyone overseeing ministry here. Ed is our only full-time paid clergy – and here I want to recognise how splendidly he has stepped up to do as much as he can as a deacon, and we very much look forward to his priesting in July…many thanks Ed. Unfortunately Sophie is on sick leave until the end of June (and we send her our love and prayers as she takes time out to cope with what as happened), and Olga has her duties at Ridley that essentially occupy her full-time – we are so grateful to her too for all she has done to bring us through the last nine weeks.

- So we have been very reliant on visiting priests from the Colleges and neighbouring churches to see us through this first period of the vacancy. A tremendous thanks to them for their help in not only maintaining our Sunday services so excellently but also our daily Eucharists – and also to Ed, Olga and the lay team of Shanti, Sally-Marie, Hannah, Neil and many more for continuing our daily Evening Prayer.

- We owe a special thanks to Matt Bullimore, who has been by our side from the day Anna died, for all the support and help he has given, both practical and spiritual. The generous offer of Corpus to have Matt and the Choir with us for a joint 10am Sunday Eucharist throughout the Easter Term has been the first stage of providing some continuity in our worship through May and June.

- Joy and I have been in close touch with the Archdeacons (Alex and for the moment James Shakespeare) and also +Stephen, ever since Anna died on the provision of some experienced oversight of St Bene’t’s ministry and operations, to bridge the gap between this August and having a new vicar, most likely in the last quarter of next year.

- We cannot say much more at the moment other than that discussions are well advanced and we hope to make an announcement about some interim arrangements quite soon. So watch this space!

Meanwhile we will endeavour to honour and build on Anna’s legacy:

- We will maintain the level of daily services and the quality of preaching from our pulpit, whose gate Anna so closely guarded!

- As we go through the process of developing the Parish Profile as part of seeking and selecting a new vicar, we will build on the Development Action Plan conversations about Deepening our Faith, Growing God’s Church and Engaging fully with the needs of our Community, that Anna had started through the discussions and questionnaire about the Deepening aspects of our three-legged plan.

- In practical terms we will continue with the project to replace the south aisle lead roof and place solar panels on it, to generate green electricity to cover our current power needs, with the excess feeding into the grid or in future enabling us to decarbonise our heating – all a part of Anna’s vision for us to be an Eco-Church.

- However, we will pause the projects to re-order the Chancel and St Anne’s Altar areas with more stone and less carpet, and to provide a disabled toilet in the organ area, as these are both more complex and need key input and approval from the next incumbent.

- We will continue the learning and formation work with the joint Study Mornings with LSM, the CREDO and all our reading and prayer groups, in line with Anna’s vision of St Bene’t’s being a centre of Teaching and Learning for central Cambridge.

- We will continue as a caring congregation with our ministry to the marginalised and excluded, with continued focus on the Cambridge Churches Homeless Project and Crossways, caring for those in abusive relationships, supporting the Besom with donations and practical projects, providing a warm space in the winter – and keeping our church open as a calm, spiritual haven for all to pray and spend time in – our ministry to visitors.

- We will maintain and grow our links with Corpus, who have been so supportive on many practical matters, working together on the decarbonisation and sustainability of our neighbouring sites and improved digital access to overcome our current livestreaming problems. This was a continuing irritation to Anna, who had propelled us into the digital age with her superb online services during lockdown, set against the backdrop of her wonderful photography.

- For stability and continuity, we intend to co-opt Neil Petersen and Andrew Welchman back onto the PCC for the coming year, to add their wisdom and vast experience of St Bene’t’s to our collective oversight and decision making at this challenging time. They have kindly agreed to do this.

A lot of this is looking outwards as well as inwards. But most of all, we will continue to look after each other. One irony of the current situation is that, shocked and devastated as we have been since Anna’s death on March 8th, we have got through to today largely because we are the caring community that she grew and nurtured. So though we are sad and distraught by the most impactful and monumental event of the past year, we should also give thanks for all the good things that have happened during this time and for Anna’s lasting legacy.

Joy and I thank you all for all the tremendous support we have received from you over the past nine weeks, and for your prayers. We pray for God’s grace as we look towards the year ahead. We all go forward in the knowledge that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. As Ed said in his Lent sermon just after Anna died – may we see Christ’s light shining in ourselves and in each other.

Thank you all.