

## Vicar's Report for the APCM

The Installation service at Holy Innocents Church was a wonderful occasion which set the tone between priest and congregation – warm, friendly and prayerful. It has been a delight to get to know members of the congregation and to discover the rich gifts that God has blessed them with, selflessly applied to the life of Holy Innocents. This is a good place, and a good community full of good people. Caroline and the children are very happy to live in Great Barton and be part of the church here and at Holy Innocents.

We know that times are so frenetic now – pandemic, war, a 'post-truth' era, where no-one has any certainty about their lives anymore. Holy Innocents Church can provide both stability and embrace change, as we look to the traditions of the past and at what those traditions may become in the future.

For some, this is an exciting time, where new vistas await us and God is leading us closer to Them in faith. For others, it is a time where what they once held to be true has become sand falling through their hands, and they are not sure how much they can hold on to.

However, the church provides a framework to hold all of those things together; the good and the true things of our tradition and the good and true things of our present, to build stronger foundations for the church of tomorrow. My hope is that we will hold it all together, *together*, and that Holy Innocents will be the destination for those seeking God today and tomorrow.

## **Worship**

And Holy Innocents Church has plenty of life to give, both to the worshipping community and the wider community of Great Barton. As we entered into a further time of restrictions as the Omnicron variant of the Corona virus rose up, we continued to provide our usual array of Sunday services, with Remembrance-tide services in both churches well attended, and a full Christmas programme of services, albeit slightly depleted. It was a great joy to welcome Great Barton Primary to a Christingle service, a really special and holy time that was such a highlight. We were able to film and send a Christmas message to the school which was also well received. The Crib Service, a whacky rendition of the Nativity Story with added special effects, went down well and feedback was that this was memorable at least! Apologies to those who were tasked with clearing up the 'fake snow' on the day, drawing remarks of your new 'bonkers' vicar!!

We have been able, thanks to the assistance of The Rev'd David Crawley and The Rev'd Mark Hunt, to resume a pattern of worship that is a mixture of parish and benefice services, both BCP and Common Worship. Holy Communion is at the centre of Anglican worship, and so to be able to offer a regular Eucharist to our parishes is quite a privilege in today's multi-parish benefice diocese.

We also give thanks to The Rev'd Brian Raistrick, who presided over BCP services in the benefice, who retired from taking services at Christmas, his last being Midnight Mass. We continue to enjoy his presence in our worshipping community, and give thanks to God for his steadfast service, especially over the past few years which have been so very difficult for all.

We have begun monthly Evensongs at Holy Innocents, as well as at St Peter's, which are well attended and seek not only to revive the musical tradition at Holy Innocents, but also to emphasise a commitment to keeping this tradition of the Church of England alive in this place. This supplements our BCP Holy Communion offering.

As we approached Eastertide, we looked forward to a Maundy Thursday service with Vigil at St Peter's, a Good Friday Reflective Service with the Benefice Choir followed by a Compline at St Peter's, and a Dawn Vigil Easter Day service (it just wasn't at dawn!). Attendance was good at Holy Innocents, but a little depleted at Maundy Thursday. The Triduum (the three main Easter services) are very much part of the Easter experience – not least because you missed having a footwash! – so I hope that next year we may attract a few more people to Holy Innocents for the same service.

Our plans for enriching our existing worship in the future are shaping up well. Our Together Café Church service, the 'resurrected' mixture of breakfast, singing, activities and prayer, has been a great success on its return – plans for an occasional bespoke Communion are underway. We hope then to invite this emergent congregation to special services at Holy Innocents, where they can make use of the beautiful church building, and we hope to include more seasonal services to allow more opportunity for this.

Our musical tradition has built upon Choral Evensong with the introduction of a monthly Sung Eucharist. We hope that this will become attractive to other budding singers, and swell the choir numbers in the coming years, as well as being joyous worship in a relaxed catholic tradition.

And a contemplative service, with reflections, silent prayer and Christian mysticism, whilst no firm plans are yet made, is hoped to begin this coming year.

The choirs of Holy Innocents and St. Peter's have joined together into a benefice choir, in order to strengthen each other, providing a strong choral voice in Sung Eucharists, Evensongs and Benefice Services. I am very grateful for all the members of the choir, who showed a willingness to merge and lift their voices as one. I'm also very grateful to Bridget Read, who has taken on my request for a convener and organiser of choir rehearsals, a consistent inviter of young people to join choir rehearsals, and for suggesting music that might supplement our worship, especially during the Eastertide, which by the time of reading you will all have enjoyed. Our choir not only lift our worship of God to new heights, but are also a strong and attractive draw to Holy Innocents – not every rural parish has a choir to boost worship, and I am very excited about where we can go with a dedicated benefice choir.

It would not do to leave out mention of a fantastic organist in Chris Bartrop, who any cathedral in the land would be happy to have play for them – Chris is versatile and accommodating, even when I want something cheesy played! It has been a joy working with Chris and I look forward to much more to come with such a vital backbone to the musical worship at Holy Innocents.

A brief note too, and thanks, to Charles Gorer for his poetic contributions, which are not only excellent, but bring a distinctiveness to the seasonal services at Holy Innocents.

All in all, I continue to be encouraged by slowly growing numbers in Holy Innocents – it has not been easy with the ups and downs of the pandemic era, but we have seen people return and new shoots braving their way through the doors of the church. With our ever-strengthening pattern of worship, we have much to offer Anglicans old and new. I intend to continue to provide services in the same tradition that Holy Innocents has enjoyed over the years and to enhance the relaxed Anglo-Catholic worship here; a liturgy rooted in seasonal and sacramental services in addition to newer, more contemporary services – those that attended the Ash Wednesday Benefice service can attest to the powerful mixture of traditional and contemporary that we may expand upon in coming years.

All in all, a tradition that leans into the catholic heritage of the Anglican church emerges, but without some of the ‘starch’ of other ‘High’ churches, reaching into the very roots of the Church of England, and indeed into the Benedictine roots of Holy Innocents Church itself.

## **Ministry & Mission**

Our ministry to the wider community has been consistent, in times of joy and of sadness. We have served the families of people gone to glory in our funeral ministry at Holy Innocents, including the funerals of many well loved local figures and congregation members. It has been a true privilege to serve these families as their loved ones take their place in the churchyard of their parish church.

A real joy to have a total of five weddings booked for the year ahead. We’re so blessed to have these couples choose Holy Innocents for their special day, and we can together build on our already excellent welcome to wedding parties to make their day as special as possible.

Similarly, a joy to welcome new members of the family of God in Holy Baptism, and such a joy to welcome Gus Pirt into the Christian family on Easter Sunday this year. We’re very much looking forward to more baptisms at Holy Innocents, with two booked already.

Pastoral visiting has, until the time of writing, been difficult with the large amount of administrative tasks that come the way of the vicar. I am very pleased to say that Peter Robinson has taken on a part-time administrative role which will enable me to spend more

time in visiting people pastorally and getting out into the community and building relationships – vital to our plan of growing in influence and number.

We have enjoyed good relations with our primary school, Great Barton Primary – at present I am able to visit once every two weeks to lead Collective Worship. The aforementioned Christingle service was wonderful, as was the bake sale in aid of Ukraine, which was wonderfully chaotic!

As one of the governors of the school, I have been able to help with policy-making and offering impartial listening and support to teachers. Headteacher Claire Ratley and myself have struck a good and relaxed working relationship, and my approach is very much to assist Mrs Ratley and the staff in any way appropriate, especially in terms of SIAMS inspections, and with maintaining and growing the Christian ethos of the school.

With the horrific invasion of Ukraine very much on our minds, in our hearts and in our prayers, Holy Innocents has thus far responded well. A Bring and Buy/Coffee Morning attracted a good crowd, and over £800 was raised to go towards supporting Ukrainian refugees. The Vigil for Ukraine was also a very special and prayerful occasion. Special thanks goes also to Katie Robson for beginning the formation of a cross-village group to support those who are taking Ukrainian people in – we hope to be able to provide a meeting point for Ukrainians in the area, and to make our Lady Chapel more accommodating to Ukrainian Orthodox Christians who might like a place to come and pray in a setting reminiscent of their own tradition.

A benefice concert by the Kirby Voices is scheduled for June. We shall continue to support our Ukrainian brothers and sisters - please continue to pray as I know you have fervently been doing.

### **Endings, beginnings and thanks**

Firstly, I wish to thank wholeheartedly Tim Frost and Angie Pearce for their enormous support to me in the first six months of ministry – not just with practical things in worship, mission and ministry, but for their caring nature and their willingness to embrace change. As we all know, change is inevitable – even though we are often comfortable where we are! – and both Tim and Angie have been true to the calling of Jesus Christ to move forward into new eras, and have helped me to do so in beginning my incumbency here and also supported me with the changes I have made. I have always maintained that a priest should be flexible enough to fit the shape of the parishes they find themselves in, but also be ready to carve out new shapes as required too. Tim and Angie have given me the confidence to do both of these things, guiding, challenging and assisting where needed. Special mentions should also go to Linda Scoles, our vergger, for her tireless work for the church, as well as being another valued advisor to me on all things Holy Innocents, and to Kathy Drakes for some of the cover she has been able to offer for some Evensongs and for the Café Church. I am very grateful to them all for their continued assistance and trust, and hope to continue to work with them in the years ahead.

And indeed a big thank you to all the members of the PCC – it isn't always easy, and disagreements are inevitable, but those times of disagreement are met with gentleness and compromise, and I am extremely grateful for that, as well as the wonderful guidance and governance that occurs in each meeting and beyond. We have missed our friend Tiz Tiffin as she continues to recover from illness, and do hope she might be able to return this year.

Last, but not at all least, a big thank you to Peter Robinson who has taken on the role of part time administrator for the benefice – a real blessing which will free up more of my time for community engagement and pastoral care, with the wonderful work on the website and social media, and for bringing order to the muddled mind of this vicar! With so many demands on time, the work that Peter will undertake will help immensely, and I'm very grateful for all the work that Peter and the churchwardens have put in to ease my administrative burden.

### **Notes on Finance**

We are in times of financial hardship. It is likely to get more difficult as the cost of living crisis heading our way in 2022 bites. However, we will do our best together to maintain and grow the church to meet that challenge. We will look at ways to increase our revenue. Increased engagement with the Great Barton Community, being outward looking and being 'missionary on our own doorstep' will help to draw people to Christ as we build relationships with others, as visible Christians in our village. And resurrecting the cafe church service in the heart of our community will give us the opportunity to be invitational to Holy Innocents Church for special occasions, perhaps even a Family Service, that we hope will result in growing numbers. Our first and foremost mission is to give everyone a chance to engage with the Living God, but we do also need to be adequately funded to do that. The congregation of Holy Innocents and the surrounding community have made generous donations to assist Holy Innocents. However, do please pray and contribute wherever you can to the running costs of the church as we advance our plans for growth in the months and years ahead.

We are especially looking forward to the musical extravaganza that will take place this Autumn, the brainchild of Annie Wallace and supported by Charles Gorer. This fundraiser for the Windows Appeal promises to be a fantastic occasion, and I'm so grateful for the excellent organisational skills of both Annie and Charles, and those on the event committee for bringing the event into being.

It does seem a bit strange to be writing this report a mere six months into my incumbency. There is much more to come. Some of the things we may plan may not work out as we wish them to. Some may be a great success. All of them are for the glory of God, and we will always remember that we labour for God to serve God's children in our community, a rapidly changing one! Let us always be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in all that we do, and always seek God's presence in all that we think, say, do and pray.

