

Rector's report 2022/2023

It's been a year and a half that I have been enjoying being your Rector. If I can introduce briefly how I feel about it, I would say: nice things have been achieved, others are on the go, much more is to come, how exciting!

Nice things have been achieved:

- One of the first things I wanted to reshape was the rota of services and after a year of use, we can say that we have found a good rhythm. It allows me to cover all the parishes on a regular basis, lay-ministers can lead several services too and calling other priests than Rev Val to cover us, is only necessary when I'm away. Weekly services are attended by only few but dedicated people. I wish there were more but at least there's a continuum of prayers across the Benefice all days.
- The Community Pantry and Hardship Fund committee is now thanks to you and people from the wider community running 4 pantries in the Benefice that, according to some written feedbacks are changing everyday lives of families who are struggling. Modest families across the Benefice are suffering the difficult economical situation. The pantries help them to care for their household and the fund gives some extra help mostly with energy bills and often coping with unexpected events. Thanks to the fund we have been able to give some grants to children from our primary schools, showing the wider community that we care for all.
- Talking about school, we have reinforced our work in our church school in Stoke and improved our relationship with our county school in Nayland. In the first one, besides the kids club run by Rev Val and some of our parishioners, I take one Collective Worship and make a pastoral visit at morning break every week. Not to mention that Jane A and I are foundation governors. As for the second, thanks to Helen S, Ministry Team member, we keep a close relationship having as a result that children come regularly to visit the church, either for educational purpose or to celebrate important moments of their academic year (some of them come also to the family service). Although less time consuming, we keep also a good relationship with Littlegarth private school which holds some of its events in St James Nayland.
- Teaching: as Lent Course went well in 2022, it is renewed in 2023. The format of two identical sessions on the day, once a week for 3 weeks seems to be right. I regularly contribute to the pastoral letter both on LSPN and on CT. I preach every Sunday in several services and when I have enough energy I record the preaching on camera and display it on various social media.
- Pastoral visits: I make private visits on invitation and/or accompanied, I take a service at the Care Home several times in the year. however for both, there's space for improvement. A diary of the Rector is advertised so that people know where they can see me: coffee mornings, village lunches, village cinemas, fêtes, dog shows, RBL meetings, etc... As you know, I also serve as chaplain once a week at Sudbury Police Station.
- Events: I have encouraged existing, unearth ancient and created new events. Church is not only on Sunday morning, it is also a continuous fellowship during the year. They get good feedbacks, are usually well attended and bring a dynamic to the community of churchgoers and send a positive message to the wider community. e.g. concerts, Lego competition, Godparents' service, Oak-tree service, bishop's visit, Boxted Methodist Silver Band events, ...

Things that are on the go:

- Social Media: This is active but can be improved. I publish on Facebook, Tweeter, YouTube and on the existing website our activities past and to come. I manage to publish all the weekly pew sheet on Social media but I'm not able to record all my sermons.
- New website: it took a while to launch the project but it's now on the go. I still miss a number of pictures of the parishes and of the acting members to finalise the shift to the new website. It is important to fulfil this project. People visiting, new residents, younger generations browse first through internet and they need to see a modern, neat and efficient window on our Benefice.

Future projects:

- Pastoral: a communication campaign about baptism, 1st communion and confirmation. This is a project that is going through the different PCCs at the moment. The two Gospel sacraments of Baptism and Communion are insufficiently known, practiced, addressed by some generations. We enjoy celebrating baptisms every year but more could be done. Some adults are baptised but were never confirmed. Some children have an understanding of the communion but haven't access to it. All these needs have to be addressed. More events to celebrate, better outreach with the wider community.
- Buildings: our church buildings until now have been devoutly cared for but in a rather passive way, responding to urgent repairs and to quinquennial inspections for instance. If we want more people in churches, either for events or for services, our churches need to be welcoming and comfortable. New generations will never be attracted by gloomy freezing cold churches. We need to be able to light them properly, equip them with good sound systems, reshape them so that they have all the commodities required and above all to ensure a comfortable temperature inside. For this last purpose, we have no other option then producing our own energy so that we can heat them permanently during the cold days.

Last report, I was talking about figures. I think it's still early for that. Although, I can tell that regarding baptisms and weddings, we are recovering the pace that used to be pre-pandemic. As for Sunday services, we need more time to observe but it seems that we aren't declining anymore and that attendance is becoming stable, even for early 8:00 services.

To sum up the general feeling of your Rector after more than a year of ministry, it's been a hardworking beginning but a fruitful and hopeful one. I'm confident and excited about the future of the Benefice. I'm sure that in a few years, we will be able to say: 'look what we've done! Thanks be to God!'

Rev Stéphane