

## **Firstly, and most importantly, some Thankyous.....**

Well it has certainly been an eventful 20 months since I came back from study leave at the end of March 2019. I would like to thank particularly Jo Jones and Sonia Docherty for the way they have worked with me during this time. I have very much appreciated all their loyalty, advice, hard work and co-leadership. It has always seemed to me that the ministry of a vicar works best in a parish when a small leadership team can operate closely together with a high degree of mutual trust and respect.

I would like to thank also the senior staff of St Mary-le-Tower, Chris Borrett (Director of Music), Will Baldry (Organist and Assistant Director of Music), and Sue Rudland (Business Development Manager for Tower House), for all their dedication and loyalty too. Of course there have been many others in these departments, including as it were the churchwarden department, who have been very good colleagues, both staff and volunteers. I am really grateful to you all for what you have achieved. Leadership is a vital function in all walks of life, and I know that I am currently working with, and St Mary-le-Tower is currently being blessed by, some outstanding staff and volunteer leadership.

This extends of course to the ministry team I am fortunate to work with; our elders, Richard Hanley, Cathy Moss, Hilary Norman and Sonia Docherty, and not least Canon Roger Pallant. Thank you for all you do too. I really appreciate being able to share the spiritual leadership of St Mary-le-Tower. There is of course always more that can be done in this area of church life, and when there are so many administrative matters for the Vicar to attend to, it is all the more important for lay leaders to engage in spiritual and pastoral ministry too.

I would also like to thank Donna Joyce for all her work as Parish Administrator and in Tower House. We have of course sadly had to let Donna go from these posts, but I would like to pay tribute to Donna for all her long hours, hard work and dedicated service to St Mary-le-Tower, which has always gone well beyond her paid hours; not to mention of course all Donna's voluntary work with the Christmas Tree Festival. She really has been one of its leading lights over the years, and there have been some years in which, without Donna I am not sure St Mary-le-Tower would have continued with the festival as an annual event.

## **SMLT remains in good shape despite.....**

It is interesting and significant to observe that in a year when so much of our church life has been dramatically changed, here we are at the start of a virtual Christmas Tree Festival on-line, where the energy and enthusiasm of recent years for the festival has been channelled by a new team, led by our vibrant new Communications Committee which Sonia has written about in her Comms report. It is often said that in the mission and ministry of the Church, that it is really God's mission and ministry, and God does faithfully provide for what is really needed, and calls people anew to take their part. In the Comms Committee we have found this to be true once again, and I would like to add my thanks for their work.

## St Mary-le-Tower Ipswich - Annual Meeting – Vicar's Address

I don't want to duplicate in this address things that have already been written in the PCC's annual report which is part of the annual accounts, and in the other reports that have been included for this annual meeting. It has not been possible to have reports comprehensively about every SMLT activity this year. If your particular area of SMLT life has not been the subject of a specific report or mention, please don't feel that that your activity is regarded as unimportant. This year, the reports tabled are either required by regulation, or are in some way part of a strategic overview of SMLT mission and Ministry. Even so, if you feel that an important strategic area has been overlooked, I am sorry, and please do tell me about it.

In many ways St Mary-le-Tower is actually in quite good shape despite the year past, though of course there is always lots more growing that we can do, and certainly financial challenges remain. I would like to thank everyone for your regular donations and generosity to the mission and ministry of St Mary-le-Tower, and also all those who generously supported the emergency appeal this year. All that generosity has ensured that SMLT can start 2021 in a slightly better financial state that it started 2020. This is a vital and wonderful achievement. It means that we can proceed to major fundraising in 2021 without the threat of an imminent cliff edge hanging over us.

### **Financial challenges remain.....**

However, please make no mistake, that potential cliff edge currently remains a threat to the mission and ministry of St Mary-le-Tower Church beyond 2021, and the fundraising we need to do in 2021 remains vital to our future as a church. There are three things I would like to say in relation to these financial challenges. Firstly, we are bearing down hard on costs. This has been a painful process and has involved considerably more work for many people. It is important to remember this.

Secondly, everyone among us in the whole life of St Mary-le-Tower needs to play their part in generous giving, whatever part of the Tower you are engaged in. No one can stand aside from the financial challenges that we face together as a church, and feel comfortably that this is really someone else's problem. We are all in this together, and none of us can feel that because we are so generously committed in practical ways, that we can then sit light to the financial responsibilities, that it is up to others to be financially generous because of our activity. Generous giving is indeed everyone's individual responsibility; to be worked out between you and God. In the end, how you use money is actually a spiritual matter too.

Thirdly, no one is expected to be generous with what you do not have or cannot afford. The generous giving principle is one of proportionality, and you may like to know that the Church of England standard is to give 5% of take home pay. Of course this has to be moderated in the light of family circumstances. For many households with several children, 5% would be a very big ask indeed, but frankly there are other households with few dependents, who could and should probably be generous with rather more than 5%. When we come to our major Giving Renewal in 2021, everyone will be hearing more about the Christian principles of generous giving. We all have to face all this, as uncomfortable as many people find the subject. We simply cannot avoid it.

## **Our Mission Priorities.....**

Moving on, if you have not already done so, please do read all the various reports associated with this annual meeting; they all help to give a strategic overview of the Mission and Ministry of St Mary-le-Tower Church. As indicated in the PCC's Annual Report for the Accounts, these principal areas of SMLT Mission are firstly Worship, Spiritual Growth & Pastoral Care, secondly Care of the Church Building and Ministry of Welcome, thirdly Choral Ministry particularly with young people, and fourthly Community Engagement through Tower House.

In my view, these all absolutely go together; they are each an essential part of the whole of what we are being called by God to do. Our church would be a much lesser place if any one of them was to be lost. I know that at times it can all seem too much, but I am today more sure than ever that all this is what God is calling us to, and to be engaged in. And if that call of God is genuine, as I firmly believe it is, then we can indeed have the faith that God will bless us with the resources we need to sustain it. It's what God does. In matters spiritual, money follows vision, and not the other way round. We just have to get the vision right, to learn to see things as God does. These four areas of SMLT Mission also fit really quite well with the diocesan strategy of growing deeper, younger, in number and in community service.

I want to finish this address by returning to how different our lives have been this year. It has indeed by considerably trying and challenging at times. Despite all the difficulties and challenges, this testing time has done something remarkable for our church. It has propelled us online, and we are now steadily growing our online presence. Who would have thought, at the beginning of the year, that this would happen in 2020. We have learned to live stream services, with lots of teething problems. The choir has worked hard to maintain its life on line, in no small way due to the energy and skills of Chris Borrett; the man is a real hero of this Covid year. Others have worked hard too, to maintain our church community during this strange time.

But do you know what has happened especially to our Sunday evening service viewing figures since the choir started offering Choral Evensong again? The viewing numbers are in the thousands! Last time I looked at Choral Evensong for Christ the King last Sunday, it had attracted more than 2,500 viewings on Facebook. That's astonishing, but it appears that with much hard work in many areas, we have stumbled into a whole new area of SMLT Mission on line. I do not think I am alone in seeing this as something very significant for the future of St Mary-le-Tower Church. On that note, thank you for reading this, thank you for all that you do, may God bless you and may you go and grow in peace.

**Revd Canon Charles Jenkin, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020**