

Vicar's Report

2023 has been a year of abundant blessings and challenges. So often it is easy to allow the challenges to overshadow the incredible instances of God at work, right here at All Saints Church.

It was the year that for me, things became a lot more familiar, no longer was everything a first, but instead there was more of an opportunity to see how things could be shaped in order to incorporate our desire as a PCC to embed welcome as an expression of God's love into every aspect of who and what we are as a church.

Easter brought 3 people to be confirmed at Lincoln Cathedral and an Easter Day Baptism at All Saints, all of which were joyous occasions and evidence of new life and growing faith within the church. Comments from the senior staff and Bishop's team expressed their delight at all that was going on here in Holbeach, and whilst we might feel somewhat distant geographically, I was delighted to hear of their awareness of the new life that is appearing hearing, an affirmation for us all.

Across the diocese, and here in our local mission partnership and benefice the impact and changes of Time to Change Together will continue to be felt as we seek to build a sustainable church for the future, these changes can, and sometimes do, feel overwhelming and maybe even unwanted. But our own situation here at All Saints has made us critically aware of how vital it is that what we do is sustainable, that we are clearly focused on what it is we want to be and do, and how that might be achieved.

Care Homes

Work in our local community is essential to our ministry and mission and thanks go to the care home ministry team for carrying out incredible work to ensure that each of our care homes and Holbeach Hospital receive a monthly service. This work in the care homes also incorporated a summer

service in church where residents and carers were invited to attend followed by afternoon tea, this was a successful and much appreciated event.

Schools

In our local schools Micki Carey-Slater and I work together to ensure that there is a Christian presence, this is particularly important in William Stukeley our Church of England School. 2023 saw all the schools using the church for a range of services. This included a sensory prayer day for William Stukeley as well as Christmas and Easter services and for all the schools. Due to the schools growing there were more services than before and we held a total of 7 Christmas services and concerts during Advent.

Church Events:

In 2023 we held a successful flower festival, a concert from the Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue band, participated in the Medieval Festival and held a craft fayre and Christmas tree festival.

The flower festival incorporated an Animal service as we celebrated our registration as an Animal Friendly church.

All the events were successful and run by the dedication and commitment of church members as an act of mission to the community. The Christmas tree festival and Craft Fayre was a particularly busy event and drew over 2000 people into the church building, many of whom had never been inside before.

In addition to these events, September saw our first Community Showcase, an event to draw together community groups and volunteers, unfortunately there was not a large footfall, possibly attributed to the fact that it was an incredibly hot day. We have decided that this event will be held bi-annually as a way of supporting community groups and charities.

Finances

With huge thanks to Carole Warner and Chris Penney we have been able to maintain a better understanding of our financial position. Sadly this has meant that we have had to reduce our parish covenant to the diocese as we can no longer afford what was originally pledged. Our hope is that this can and will increase, but it is likely to take time to do so, particularly in light of building repairs and necessary maintenance work.

Giving Campaign

In May we launched our giving campaign, a 4 week series of sermons and talks around giving, discussion around the Parish Giving Campaign and other ways of giving beyond financial such as time, mission and ministry. The Friends of All Saints scheme was also launched in September as a means of encouraging people to commit to giving to the upkeep of All Saints.

There has been a small but steady uptake of the Friends scheme. Unfortunately the giving campaign produced a very small increase in giving and this will impact on our future ability to pay the required parish covenant for All Saints as a key mission church. There are future plans to target increasing giving and my hope and prayer is that they will bear fruit.

Music

In August we gave thanks for Barry Lancaster as he retired as director of music. Whilst he is missed, we have been hugely blessed by the contribution that Kim Biggs has made in ensuring a high standard of musical provision and taking on the choir rehearsals.

Volunteers

This year we have seen many new people step into roles whether that be welcoming and serving, reading and intercessions, leading home groups or taking on the role of church warden. As Baptised members of the church

we all have a calling to serve Christ and each of us has a role to play according to our gifts.

All Saints is your church and as such those who volunteer to take on roles do so as an expression of their calling and faith to serve and worship in this place.

I could not possibly thank everyone individually for so many involved, some publicly and some very much behind the scenes. Having said that I would like to particularly thank the new church wardens who have risen to the challenge of the role and provided a huge amount of support for me as I seek to minister to All Saints.

I would also like to thank Carolyn Parrott for her largely unseen work as a sacristan for years as she steps down from her role.

Whatever your role, large or small you each have a part to play as the body of Christ in this place, your role is valued and important as we seek to serve God together in Holbeach

There are of course, things for the future:

- To establish greater financial security and work towards increasing our parish share so that we can secure our future as a type 1 Mission church
- AS we seek to engage further with Time to change together we are called to work more meaningfully with the rest of the local mission partnership, living out what it means to be a church that resources those around us. Supporting and collaborating with those around us, this comes with the challenge of loosening our grip on things that we might hold as 'ours' in order to build God's Kingdom.
- To continue to build on our connections with schools, care homes and the wider community
- To explore ways of working with children and young people that will encourage families to attend church.

- To be alert to the needs within our community and explore ways in which we can serve them beyond the walls of the church.
- To continue to grow and develop each other as disciples, to have clear pathways for encouraging and growing calling and growing people in faith.
- To develop a mission action plan that reflects our aims and plans for the next 5 years
- To complete the work on our governance so that we can offer a safe environment for all who volunteer, worship and enter the building.

As I continue to serve and minister in this place I am grateful for your help and support, church is never the sole responsibility of the parish priest is and utterly reliant on you to make All Saints what it is today. Your commitment, hard-work and faith is what the anchor on which All Saints is held.

In thinking and praying about the future of All Saints I return to the words of Isaiah 43:1-2, 5, 19

But now thus says the LORD,
 he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
 Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine.
 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
 when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
 and the flame shall not consume you.
 Do not fear, for I am with you;
 I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
 I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.

Whatever the future may hold, no matter what challenges lie ahead, we know that we are held by a steadfast God, who will not allow us to stumble or fall, who will lead us to new places and in new way providing we are

open to what that might be. As we join God on this incredible journey of faith, we do so in the footsteps of all the Saints who have gone before and the knowledge that we are held by love everlasting.

Church Warden's Report (Pastoral)

First, I would like to thank you for all your support and encouragement, it has been a privilege to serve as one of your Church Wardens along with Roger, whom I would personally like to thank for the wonderful work he has done since we both took office last year. His work behind the scenes has been tremendous, most of which I would not have the first idea how to go about it.

I would also like to thank Sherine for her ministry and dedication to All Saints despite having been through a particularly difficult twelve months herself. Under her ministry, care and guidance and most of all dedication, as a parish, we are a thriving parish with a core church community and a focal point for the townsfolk of Holbeach. This has been proven with key services and events throughout last year, and some new members in the congregation, not to mention the growing number of Baptisms we have had.

The other person I would like to thank and I'm sure she will be thanked elsewhere in other reports, is Kim Biggs. Without her taking over the music ministry on Barry's retirement, having not found a suitable replacement yet, we would not have had the enrichment and variety of music that we have been treated to and the alternative would have been unthinkable. (piped hymns and voluntaries from CDs!)

I would like to draw your attention to some figures for church services last year especially during Advent and Christmas.

The footfall for all services during Advent was an incredible 1,862, which includes 1,515 students, teachers, and civic dignitaries for special services

outside of the normal Sunday services: these were the schools Christmas services.

Our own in-house services had good attendance. The carol service had a large congregation, and the Christingle and Crib service figures were up on the previous year. The combined figures for 2023 were 217 compared with 168 in 2022 which is almost a 25% increase.

Leslie Crowson

Church Warden's Report (Fabric)

Since coming into post in 2023 the majority of my efforts have been towards the prevention of rain water ingress into the church and the restoration of the West window.

With regard to the former a considerable amount of time has been expended in trying to (a) prevent the ingress and (b) put in place measures that will enable the structure of the church to be protected from the increased volume, frequency and intensity of rain that we are now faced with. I am pleased to report that in respect of the South Aisle the work is complete, as of the date of this meeting, and it is to be hoped that the rain water damage to the great organ pipes and choir vestry will not re-occur. The cost of carrying out this work has been funded in part by an insurance claim and a contribution from the Mary Bass Charity for which we are very grateful. Of course it is sometimes difficult to determine the entry point of rain water into a structure despite the relative ease of finding where it appears within the building and there are several other areas that require investigation, notably the church tower/spire as water is dripping in adjacent to the south elevation of the Mary Bass room ceiling and bell ringing platform, the corner of the Lady Chapel and a few other isolated areas. This preventative work will continue during the course of the next year. Other areas of concern that have caused us problems are debris, leaves, and deleterious materials in the gutters and rain water downpipes. There is an increased

frequency of having these cleaned and the parish Council have been requested to cut back some of the overhanging tree branches. We are still waiting for the latter to be done.

As you will be aware the West window has been removed for restoration and it is intended that it will be returned and re-installed in time for Ascension Day. Whilst being removed it was found that some areas the window panels had originally been made too small and as a consequence they relied heavily on excessive cementitious mortar to hold them in place. To remedy this additional leads will be added around the outer perimeter to ensure a correct fitment within the glazing groove. We are immensely grateful to a private donor for a substantial donation towards the costs of the restoration as well as to the Mary Bass Charity and Chosen for their very kind donations without which this restoration would not be possible and we would have been potentially faced with the window starting to fall out. We also arranged a trip to see the restoration process at Devlin Plummer Stained Glass works near Norwich which was attended by over 20 of our parishioners and an enjoyable and informative day was had by all.

During the forthcoming year there will be some electrical works carried out to improve the emergency exit lighting and to rectify some issues raised during the course of a recent electrical inspection.

The church cleaner is currently on medical leave and so members of the PCC have very kindly offered to assist in keeping the church clean and tidy for which I am very grateful.

I would very much like to re-start the monthly working group as there are a number of items of maintenance that can be done to save the costs of employing external contractors which can be discussed with the incoming PCC committee. Finally I would like to thank all those who have helped me in the first year of my appointment which is immensely appreciated.

Roger Jennings

Care Home and Hospital Services

Judy, Lynne, Martin and Kevin visit Holbeach Hospital, Patchett Lodge, Nutten Stoven and Mayfield once each of 10 months of the year. We share taking services at Holbeach Meadows with the Methodist Church. Sadly we no longer go to Beech Lodge as we found that the residents are unable to choose to join us and unable to understand.

We have a theme each month - Candlemass, Easter, Remembrance, Christmas, Animals, Spring, Creation, Farming and Water of Life. We have pictures where appropriate and props for the residents to handle especially those with poor or no sight. Most love to join in with the hymns and Lords Prayer.

Holbeach Hospital are kind enough to give us coffee and cake afterwards so we can chat with and get to know the residents better.

In August we have a service and afternoon tea at All Saints when residents and staff from all homes come to us if possible. This past August our theme was 'at the seaside' and was great fun with many requests for more services in church. We are hoping to have an Autumn themed one this year too.

Lynne Barkes

Bell Ringing

2023 has been a very good year. We have managed to maintain a good attendance for weekly Sunday morning Service ringing, and in July we introduced the Thursday afternoon practices which have proved both popular and beneficial, introducing newcomers to bell ringing and providing an opportunity for more experienced ringers to advance their skills. Have-a-Go Ringing at the Flower Festival was also well attended and we are hoping to repeat this event at the Flower Festival this year. We were very pleased to ring at All Saints on the occasion of the Coronation of the King and Queen on Saturday 6th May!

We had to call in the Bellfounders from Loughborough in September as two of our bells were in need of expert attention, this was resolved and all the bells are now in good order. Also, a grateful thank-you to everyone who participated in the belfry clean-up in July! A couple of the ropes may need replacing fairly soon as part of general wear-and-tear.

Our objectives for 2024 include maintaining our Sunday Service team, welcoming newcomers and restarting the Thursday practices once the work to the West Window is completed, and talking of which, we are certainly hoping to ring the bells at that time for the Service of Dedication!

Michael Slater

All Saints Mothers' Union, Holbeach

Over the last two years All Saints Mothers' Union (MU) has attracted new members. Although numbers remain small this is something to celebrate. Membership provides all those involved with enjoyable monthly meetings, each of which comprises of a prayer service, an activity or talk together with social time and branch business.

Earlier this year members enjoyed a visit and most interesting talk by Revd Sylvia Rice Dixon, Lincoln Diocesan Mothers' Union President. Other highlights of the past year include our involvement in 2023 Flower Festival display and the Christmas Tree Festival. Members enjoyed an outing with Afternoon Tea at Springfields. In addition our support for MU charities was increased by members' donations, our May Tea meeting and a Harvest raffle.

The sudden death in December of our dear friend and fellow member Ann Dacey left us both shocked and saddened. Ann was a true friend to many and a loyal and long serving member of All Saints Mothers' Union.

Jackie Sheldrake

Junior Choir

It has been a year of mixed fortunes for the junior choir. We currently have fifteen young choristers on our books, a reduction since last year. In July we said a fond farewell to Paige, who joined the choir at its inception in 2016 and has been a loyal and dedicated member ever since. She has gone to study Chemistry at Nottingham University and we wish her every success in the future.

Subsequently, our four other 'original' members have also left us to concentrate on their studies, and we wish them all well too. Of these, we were delighted to welcome Matthew into our senior choir, and he has been a tremendous asset to our music-making in church, with his exceptional talents in trumpet/cornet playing and increasing skill in conducting, in addition to his high standard of singing. He even composed a short piece for us to sing for Barry's retirement!

Since September we changed the format of our practices to allow the junior and senior choirs time to sing together. This has been very enjoyable and successful, as the juniors get experience of the adults singing other parts in harmony with their own. We still operate three areas of learning – singing, recorder tuition and Christian teaching – with the Christian element taking place as one group over hot chocolate and toast during our Choir Club session.

We have continued to nurture our members' musical skills and abilities and are delighted with the increasing confidence and skill/knowledge they are showing. They are still training for RSCM awards and we look forward to completing these in 2024. Over the year they performed at many services and took part in several events including carol singing, a youth summer camp (Over 11s) and preparing the Easter garden. We look forward to putting on our annual concert in July. We are delighted to announce that we have just been awarded £1094.12 from the Co-op through their Community Champions scheme.

Senior Choir

The most significant event of 2023 was undoubtedly Barry's retirement in August. He is a wonderful organist and choir director and so his boots are big ones to fill! There have been a couple of enquiries for the post, which have not proved fruitful, so I am continuing as "Acting Organist" for the time being.

The senior choir members continue to be wonderfully loyal and hard-working, and I am most grateful to them for this as well as their musical skills. Alongside the hymns, we sing an anthem at most Sunday morning Eucharist and at Evensong services, plus all the 'specials' such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Ascension, Pentecost, and events at Christmastime. As the only church in the area who hold regular Evensong services, we are blessed to have the opportunity to sing psalms and canticles, which also enhance our abilities as a choir. If you have never been to Evensong before, please do come along sometimes to experience a different side of worship and to swell our small congregation of regulars.

We currently have nine regular members, along with several friends with close connections who come to join us when they can, including two singers from the Moulton choir who join us for Evensong and related practices. I would also like to express my grateful thanks to Gill, who prepares our weekly menus, and to Matthew, who often helps with conducting.

Kim Biggs

Deanery Synod Report

The elected Deanery Synod Representatives for 2023/24 have been Kim Biggs and Kevin Dodd. One or both of us have tried to be present at each meeting; this has not always been possible; however, we always receive copies of all the reports and minutes.

Meetings took place in May, September, November 2023 and February 2024.

We seek to represent the interests of All Saints Holbeach in the wider context of our participation as a Key Mission Church within our Deanery and Local Mission Partnership, and report back to the PCC where necessary. The Synod is generally well supported, with around 20 to 25 representatives and clergy from the eighteen deanery churches present at each meeting. Barbara Hutchinson usually chairs the meetings as Rural Dean and key information is reported on by David Ingle as Secretary, and financial information by Paul Arnold.

Meetings usually last for around 2 hours and cover a wide-ranging tabled agenda. Apart from the formal approval of minutes from the previous meeting and reports on finances, including Parish Covenant etc., there is always plenty of lively discussion about a wide range of topics. These include ongoing work and progress implementing Resourcing Sustainable Church and Time to Change together, Local Mission Partnerships, reorganisation of the Deanery, and feedback from Deanery Chapter meetings. There is an opportunity for individual churches to advise on upcoming events, and report on any special projects they are running. Our deanery Youth & Children's Worker presents a comprehensive report on her activities and plans, which are then discussed. We also have a report on the Diocesan Synod and any issues from the diocese that may affect our deanery.

The Deanery Synod also discusses and approves funding applications for small individual mission projects, such as purchasing mission course material and supporting specific mission costs and practical help. If you are involved with a mission project for All Saints that could benefit from a small grant or have an idea for one, please ask for it to be put on the agenda for the next PCC meeting so that it can be discussed.

Bishop Nicholas attended the May 2023 meeting; he discussed the appointment of Steven Conway as Bishop of Lincoln that had taken place that same day. He went on to say that he wanted time with the Deaneries and asked the meeting to tell him how we felt, what was needed to happen for the future, and what we wanted as a Deanery as part of Time to Change Together. There was a very wide-ranging discussion during which it was put to the Bishop that the Diocese didn't always listen to the needs of the individual parishes and more needed to be done, particularly with the availability and low number of priests across the deanery. Several parishes put forward their own particular views. Bishop Nicholas was thanked for attending, and we look forward to welcoming him again to continue the discussion.

The February 2024 meeting started as a joint meeting with the Elloe West Deanery, as we are part of the Elloes Deanery Partnership. Specific agenda items discussed the progress of the Local Mission & Deanery Partnerships and progress with Time to Change Together. The second section was split into two separate meetings, one for each Deanery.

We hope this provides an overview of the activity of the Deanery Synod in the past year. If you have any specific questions, we will try to answer them for you.

Kim Biggs and Kevin Dodd