

Rector's Report

This is my first report as Rector of the new Benefice of Chelsfield with Green Street Green and Pratts Bottom. Here in the Parish of Chelsfield 2021 was a year which brought with it joy tinged with sadness and some surprises too.

The Coronavirus pandemic and the associated restrictions continued to impact church life with closures in the earlier part of the year and the requirement to work within the evolving guidelines as they were published. However, we have not ceased in worship and service whether that be in our buildings, in the churchyard or through social media and for that I thank everyone who has worked so hard in these challenging times.

As we reflect on the year we pay tribute to Reverend John Tranter who retired in May. His enthusiasm and dedication to the Parish ensured a stable foundation from which we can grow in relationship with the Parish of Green Street Green and Pratts Bottom. Rev John's "official farewell" was a little delayed taking place in August (thanks to the virus) just before Reverend Michael Gentry took up his role of Associate Rector a few weeks later. However, Rev John was to make a surprise return for Midnight Mass at Christmas when we unexpectedly called upon him due to an urgent and last minute need for cover – something that no one expected but everyone enjoyed!

Over the last two years some hard decisions have had to be made but I hope that we have spurred one another on in prayer and service, with doorstep visits, walks, reflections, a listening ear on the phone or online etc. It has been a time of pain and frustrations but also joy and new opportunities.

As we return to a new normal, we know there have been losses. A loss of connections for some; a loss of faith for others; a loss of worth for those who have lost work or educational opportunities; practical losses with the loss of room lettings and congregation members all contributing to the deficit in our budget. But we have also gained: new knowledge of Information Technology; new connections in our community, not least through the increased numbers of baptisms that are now being carried out and the reopening of groups such as the Memory Café and the Toddlers Group.

We need to hold onto the lessons learnt, and new ways in which we have grown. As we continue to open up, I know we will need spaces to listen and help each other process the last couple of years and I believe God will meet us as we share and reflect together.

It is with that thought in mind and with the formation of the new Benefice on 1 June and the delight of Rev Michael's arrival we are now moving forward in identifying areas where the two parishes will work best together and where each identifies the mission priorities for the areas they serve.

As we look ahead to the future still not fully knowing how things may yet look, may we look with confidence, keep our eyes on Jesus and entrust ourselves and the life of our church to him.

Jesus said; 'I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18). He is still building His Church. We all still have a part to play.

As the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth; 'Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain' (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Revd Susan Atkinson-Jones
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