

Team Rector's Report to All Saints' Annual Parochial Church Meeting

I began last year's Report to this meeting by saying that it would be my last as I would be retiring from stipendiary ministry. Well, I am still here and it most certainly was not my intention to be continuing as Team Rector and in charge of All Saints. Without going into any detail, the reason for still being in post is that it has been difficult for me to secure the right property for retirement. However, progress is being made and as soon as I have secured a property, I will submit my resignation to the bishop. I do feel that I am holding things up here at All Saints as I believe new, strong, energetic leadership is needed here to develop the mission and ministry of the church.

I say this because we are all aware that we are not growing as a congregation both numerically and spiritually and this needs to be addressed headon. As a congregation we are not alone in facing this challenge and of course this is why as a diocese we have embarked on Mission Action Planning (MAP), to help us identify our priorities and then to set out a series of achievable goals that hopefully will lead to growth and renewal within the church and make a difference to our local community.

In the coming months, the PCC will have to embark upon the task of drawing up a parish profile setting out the vision, priorities and goals of the church. I know it is the intention of the churchwardens to begin that process before I leave so that the profile is in place immediately the vacancy occurs. Of course the appointment will be a dual role of Team Rector of the Benefice and also priest in charge of All Saints, and that means there will be the involvement of the other churches as far as the Team Rector's appointment is concerned. So this will be a very critical time in the life of this church as you set out a vision for the way ahead, for as it says in Proverbs: **'Where there is no vision, the people perish.'** (Proverbs 29.18)

You will see in the church's MAP one of the priorities is to **'make the church building inspirational for 21st century mission and ministry'** and the goal to achieve this is **'reordering the internal layout of the church.'** The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has agreed to embark upon a journey hopefully leading to the eventual reordering of the interior of the church – removing the pews, laying new flooring with under floor heating, removing the screen between the north aisle and the Langley Chapel and decorating the church. The purpose of this reordering is to make the church more welcoming, accessible and a flexible space for worship, concerts and community use. We are not proposing something completely unheard of, unthinkable and completely revolutionary. Many other churches up and down the land have identified the need to make their church buildings fit for the purpose of mission in today's world. We have already seen what is possible as a good number of the congregation have already visited three churches which have undergone refurbishment. Those of us who visited these churches, returned to All Saints the same day, and we were immediately aware of how tired and inflexible our church interior

is. This is a very exciting journey we have embarked upon and of course not one I will see to completion but having this as a top priority for the days ahead, may be something that attracts a new priest, and maybe one who has already experience of leading a congregation through such significant change and development. The next steps are for the church architect to draw up potential schemes for reordering, to involve the Diocesan Advisory Committee and then to have a presentation in church of a virtual reordering to give us an idea as to how a reordered church interior might look. We will keep the congregation and the wider community informed step by step and we hope this will be a really significant part of the vision for the future. I have not mentioned the cost of this enterprise and deliberately so as at this very early stage we have no idea what the cost might be. However, if we really are committed to this project, then a fundraising strategy will have to be drawn up and I know that there are people in the congregation, and perhaps further afield, who will be more than willing to offer their services. A number of years ago a book appeared entitled **'Re-Pitching The Tent'** by Richard Giles, a former curate in this diocese. He went on to become Dean of Philadelphia in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. This book is an excellent presentation of the theological and practical reasons for reordering and making our church buildings powerful expressions of the Christian faith. I am happy to lend it to anyone who might wish to read it.

I want to end my address by thanking the churchwardens, Brian and Richard, for all they do for the church and for their support and encouragement of me. Thank you also to the members of the PCC, who on your behalf oversee the governance and mission of the church. Thank you to those PCC members stepping down and welcome to the new members of the PCC who are willing to offer their time and talents by serving on the church council. I could continue thanking people and the danger is that I would omit someone and so to avoid that I simply want to say a very sincere thank you to everyone who plays a part, however great or small, in the smooth running of the church.

Dag Hammarskjöld was a former Secretary General of the United Nations and he died in a plane crash in 1961. After his death, he was found to have kept diaries full of rich practical spiritual wisdom and among his thoughts were these and I end with them: **'For all that has been –thanks! To all that shall be – yes!'**

The Revd Canon David Lawson
Sunday 23rd April 2017