

## **Annual Parochial Church Meeting 2009 - Vicar's address**

The context of our annual meeting this year is our celebration of Easter - celebrating the risen life of Jesus among us: the exuberant energy of Easter which burst out of the empty tomb and which energizes and disturbs us as Jesus' followers, his Church. As I look back over the past 12 months there has been plenty of evidence of that Easter energy and life.

Looking outwards: We have been an active part of the Darwin bicentenary, which continues later in the year with the visit of Professor Frances Young on November 15th at 6pm.

Songs of Praise was an unforgettable experience which really put us on the national map.

We enjoyed the visit of delegates from our link diocese of the parish of St Peter's Ipoh in West Malaysia.

The Ark had an excellent first year, providing a focus for our practical concern for vulnerable people in the town.

The Borough Council became a town Council, and we have been officially asked to continue to be Shrewsbury's civic church (with the Vicar of St Chad's as Council Chaplain).

Looking inwards: to our own life, where there is also plenty of evidence of that exuberant and disturbing Easter energy.

For the first time for some years the average Sunday attendance figures grew significantly in 2009, and there was a big increase in the number of baptisms. There was a small increase in the number of marriages, and there is a real opportunity for St Chad's here, now that the Church of England has made it easier to get married in the church of your choice.

Musical life is flourishing, with concerts, choirs and a new music festival. Ideas pour out of David Leeke!

We have had a parish week-end at Swanwick and parish conference at the inspiring new Trinity centre, Meole Brace.

Five working groups have been launched, the idea behind them being to take the handbrake off church life, and release that Easter energy. There is evidence of the success of that across all the groups, especially the communications group. Groups chaired by lay people are more successful than those chaired by the Clergy!

Which brings me to the ministry of the church - its people, the Easter life we celebrate in one another. There is a difference between shared ministry and collaborative ministry. The thinking behind shared ministry is that the ministry is essentially the Vicar's, and because there are fewer Clergy these days, s/he needs more people to help.

Collaborative ministry on the other hand says that the ministry Christ gives us belongs to the whole people of God, and must be shared among them according to gifts, needs and abilities. It is collaborative ministry we seek at St Chad's - which is why I have enjoyed David Leeke's arrival so much; he is a real colleague, who offers leadership and enthusiasm in the area of music. It has also been great to watch Val Jones' ministry develop, in particular her involvement in worship and in pastoral care.

We are certainly not ageist in this church; Henry Heath reached 90 and continues to show an amazing amount of that energy which is the theme of this address. So does Pat Rantisi. And our retired Clergy, especially Chris Walker and Richard Hayes and their

wives. Without them life for me would not be possible. I could also mention Adrian Richards and many others.

I want more and more people to feel that sense of collaborative ministry - that this is their church rather than the one they worship in. There is so much going on here - do read the pew sheet (also available each week on our website). The working groups need more members - you! - if they are to be fully effective.

The future is exciting. The parish conference encouraged us to look at what we do well and what we do less well. Chris and I are conscious that what we do less well is nurture - welcoming and looking after people once they have set a tentative foot inside this building.

Too many - especially young families - start worshipping here, stay for a bit, and then disappear. We need to put more resources into helping them grow in faith and commitment. We rely too much on our valiant band of faithful junior church leaders and need to support them better. That needs resources and we will be exploring ways of finding outside funding for that.

And then of course there is our future development plans here. An open congregational meeting is to be held here (in May) at which our excellent new architect will be showing you what our thoughts about the inside and outside of this church in the future are.

Finally - a personal note. One of the more useful things Bob Jackson, Archdeacon of Walsall, has discovered is that on average the most productive years of an incumbency are those between seven and twelve. This is my eighth, and I think he's right! I have always felt that this job needed at least ten years, and I feel very positive looking ahead. All Clergy need outside interests, and I am greatly enjoying the stimulus of the General Synod and membership of the Inclusive Church part of Anglicanism (see its website for further details).

Marriage and family as you know have always been a priority for me and it is wonderful to be celebrating our Silver Wedding anniversary in April this year. My amazing wife has become an honorary Professor (of end of life care, at Birmingham university) in the last twelve months, and together we have launched Omega, the National Association of End of Life Care, based here in Shrewsbury (in Town Walls). We would welcome your interest and involvement with that; it has just won a national £1.7m bid to run "Caring with Confidence" groups across the country, specialising particularly in bereavement and end of life care.

Keri is particularly blessed with abundant Easter energy!

We send all of you our love and best wishes,

*Mark*

***Vicar of St Chad's with St Mary's and St Alkmund's Shrewsbury***

***"Open doors, open hearts, open minds"***

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