

**Record of the Annual verbal report given by The Revd Camilla Walton
to the annual church meeting of
St Michael and All Angels, Beaconsfield church, 2010.**

The verbal report on the day may have varied slightly from this content, however the essence is the same.

What I intend to say this morning is threefold:

- Firstly I would like to record our grateful thanks to the key officers for their ministry in the past year, and also to note the wider activities.
- Secondly I would like to look back over the past year and our shared ministry within it. I say shared ministry because that is what 'being church' is – it is neither a club nor building: but a group of people who share a common love for, and relationship with God.... and who are seeking to act out this love and relationship as people of God in the world, as agents of transformation in God's world. In this I will refer to the vision plan shared this time last year and how that has worked itself out.
- Thirdly I would like to share with you hopes for the coming months, perhaps including challenges and joys in particular my hope to discern with you what it is God is calling us to now as we share his work of bringing Christ to the world.

So firstly there are several 'thank-you's' that must to be said here today.

The churchwardens: Chris and Daphne,

For your quiet efficient work to keep the show on the road: - You have dealt with such a variety of things including building works, filling in forms to support church ministry, and being there to support the congregation and myself in our ministries. Thank you both so much. Daphne, you have been conscientious in your time as warden but feel that for family and other commitment reasons you cannot continue in the role. So I want to say a special thank you for your year, for the good humour and attention to detail that you have given. Also thank you for offering to take on the role of Secretary to the DCC, which we have gratefully accepted.

Next I must thank Heather for her time as the DCC secretary. For her patience with us as we have debated the finer details of a specific sentence in the minutes or for our forgetfulness in producing the reports needed from the sub-committees. You have been a quiet thoughtful help at all our meetings and we are very grateful for all the time you have given this past year.

The members of the DCC.

As you have heard the DCC has met during the year and we have held some interesting meetings where debate and discussion has been a sign of healthy respect and robust discernment for God's will for the church. In particular I would like to thank the committee for the extra time they have generously given in this ministry in order to steer us to a vision for the resource centre, and by meeting as part of working groups to look at the various activities of the church. These working groups are always happy to accept help by people not on the DCC but who are interested in such area's, do ask if you think this might be something you would like to do.

As you may know there are always at least one third of the committee membership that retire at the end of our church year. This way we keep the committee fresh and do not wear out anyone (at least that is the idea!) This year is no different so I would like to give special thanks to Helen Baker, Graham Peters, Mary Bischoff, and Margaret Skinner who are at the end of their term, and of course Brian Hart.

Further thanks must be given to Hazel, - again you have worked as our Licensed Lay minister and given so much to God and to our community. You have led and preached at services, continued to grow the Early Bird services, visited groups and people and continued with the Team shop ministry. Thank you for all that you do.

This year has seen the passing of some much loved members of our congregation and held some difficult times for others. Once again I have been moved by the great care and support that this church gives to those in need. To the bereaved, the sick, the infirm. This ministry of care, of binding up the broken hearted is an important part of witnessing to the love of God in the world, it has been done on our behalf by the authorised church visitors, ably assisted by others. However all of us in one way or another contribute to this work so we must give thanks to God for all that has been done in his name.....

Within her role of co-ordinating pastoral care Kathryn has enabled the care of St Michaels members and people in the wider community. We are also very blessed that she is part of the key Deanery team that train Pastoral visitors and so she has been able to give us access to the latest thinking, training and developments of this important visible work of the church. Thank you Katherine and the team for all you do.

I would like to bring to a close this first part of my report by thanking everyone for the care and support given to myself during the illness, terminal care and death of my mother. Your generosity in forgiving my vulnerability and your prayers for me and the family as we have travelled the road of bereavement has touched me deeply, and I speak with humility at your Christ like love. Thank you all.

- **Secondly looking back over the past year and our shared ministry within it.**

At the annual meeting last year I reminded us that the context in which we are church today is very different from the context that church existed in even as short a time as 20 years ago. We remembered the two styles Robert Warren uses in his book *'Being Human Being Church'* to describe how a church might operate.

the Church in 'inherited mode'	= building + priest + stipend
or 'emerging mode'	= community (people and priest) + faith + action.

I suggested that we had our feet in both camps, and that the Church of England had for some time been in a time of transition or a period of 'bridging' if that makes sense. Bridging from past Christendom, (the Great Britain where all children went to Sunday school, and there were no sports matches played or shops open on a Sunday! Remember those times, incredible but true). and the time of now, a church living in the world but not of the world, where we have to reclaim the part of our faith, our lives, that depend upon the Holy Spirit to energise our mission to the world.

Being to a degree a church of two natures can feel exciting and challenging, and will probably be a bit messy and uncomfortable for all of us at some time or other. So I suggested we noted Warren's guidance in handling this time by becoming a church with a high value on generating a lively and open community, with light and flexible structures to enable the true purpose of the church to be fulfilled.

We certainly have succeeded in the former, being a church with a long tradition of natural community, of care for those in need and, hopefully, of welcome to all comers. We cannot rest on our laurels, it is possible in a church containing deep relationships or friendships that we give an initial warm welcome and then fail to follow up by inviting newcomers to join our house groups or lunches. Let's hope we will be mindful of that interesting fact given from Bishop Dena when she visited us:

"If people speak over coffee in the first 3 weeks you are building relationships, if after 3 months they have been for a shared supper or such a time where deeper conversations can take place they will feel part of community".

So I remind us of the areas of focus suggested for the past year :

1. To start holding a Book of Common Prayer service at the early Sunday service. This has indeed been achieved, and seems to be well received. The time change to 8.00am has also happened and owes much to the grace of those who attend that service. As a consequence I have been able to attend and occasionally lead the Early bird services and meet with the families that only go to that part of our church.

2. We were to hold an event so we could come together as church to celebrate our strengths and points of growth and discuss focussing them onto particular mission work. The aim was to make the most of our existing church family contacts and seeking the will of God for the shape of the future. From this we will have a focus for our mission and prayer life.

We did indeed hold an 'away time' for the church at which I recall were about 30 attendees'. Andrew Gear from the diocese introduced us to the key concepts of Living Faith, the diocesan model for being and growing church community. He also helped us discern what we valued in our church, and where we thought God was asking the church to be focussed in the future. The strong message from the time together was how much we value the relational nature of our church, as a strength for ourselves and to offer to the town around us. There was also a strong recommendation to look to strengthen our work with children, youth and young parents. The group also wanted to meet again to develop what was started and to invite others to come along and share in the discussions.

So we have met the target to gather together and identify our strengths, celebrated them in worship and identified our mission and prayer work as needing to be focussed on the young families God seems to be drawing into the church.

'The aim to make the most of our existing church family contacts' was well met by the excellent survey Lisa offered to all our young family contact from various areas. The initial responses made clear how important it was to children who attended Sunday school or Early Birds that they did so with others. In other words we needed to try to meet the challenge of how it felt for one or two children attending study with a couple of adults. It also became clear that our communication of what families and children could be involved in was not successful, for example people who attended Toddler club did not know about Sunday school, or Early birdsWe responded by re-structuring the children and family work moving from a weekly Sunday school to a monthly Sunday Club where games, activities and bible teaching was available in groups specific for certain ages. This meant that for 3 out of the 4 regular monthly Sundays there is a specific activity for families to choose from. The response by the leaders to make the change was energetic and grace filled, and the response from the families speaks for itself. The last 6 months, in particular this year we have seen a huge growth in attendance to all the Sunday activities for families and children. We should thank the children's work team for their hard work in this area and praise God for all the blessings he has given us in this area of ministry. May he continue to guide and bless us in the year ahead.

3. The invitation of Revd Roly Bain, hosting workshops for local people in percussion, inviting people to attend Greenbelt.

As reported in the magazines we did all these three things and there were some positive and negatives to learn from them. In addition two adults came for the first time to the Christian event of Greenbelt which gave us a chance to deepen our friendships and explore faith together. Others came on a day basis. The percussion workshop went well, and was asked to be held on an annual basis. I understand the family service with Roly was in the main very well received but that the workshop was, well a disaster. I think from this we have to recognise that either it was the wrong time of year or perhaps just not the right activity to offer. However we do need to remember that in order to catch fish we need to keep throwing our nets out of the boat. Sometimes they will come in full to bursting and other times we need to look to Jesus for guidance on what to do.

4. One of the biggest quests for Gods help in our vision was the aim to move forward the provision of the church resource centre. As you know we have indeed moved from discussions to a firm idea of what we feel will aid us in our work here. We have hosted the visit from the Diocesan Advisory committee for the building and I recently received an interesting note from Archdeacon Karen stating that they were most supportive of our plan and would be encouraging us to think even more creatively! I'm not sure what she means as I have not yet seen the report from the committee. So again we must thank God for the gifting of individuals who have enabled this to move forward, particularly Jean Dean and the wardens.

When I started this report I felt that the past year had been one of treading water. One where I for one had not met the targets set for myself in enabling, nurturing caring and leading St Michael's. However in writing this I discover God has done wonderful things this past year. Because of the many and varied gifts and talents he has placed here in each of us we have done a great deal. And for myself, perhaps in being here I was able to be less of the Vicar I hoped to be and yet because of your kindness that has been ok.

As your vicar to have the role

'to care, tend and celebrate the existing church, people, structures, traditions, but also to offer models and resources that will be freeing and enabling: nurturing ways to grow and supporting effective ministry for all we touch. I am both your servant and your leader, supporting and challenging.

So I move on to suggest some hopes for our way ahead this coming year:

- I hope we will move closer to having a Vision for this church which we all feel a part of and understand. To do that I think it will be good to use the Living Faith material of the Diocese. This year we are invited to concentrate in particular on 'Sustaining the Sacred Centre'

What might that look like? Sustaining the sacred centre? Is this about worship, personal development, prayer? What sustains your deep relationship with God?

- I look forward with excitement and hope for our Resource Centre. If we are to be able to grow in Faith and draw others to God this is a vital part of our tool pack. A place to meet in, to invite others to, to study in, to spread into during family work of Sunday Club. So let us pray for and be part of creating the funds that will make the plans into God's reality. Let's be people who believe if we ask for the necessary money to make this happen God will hear us and answer.

- There are pieces of work that we have started but which need to be concluded:

The family questionnaire – have we made the most of the suggestions within the responses? And have we let those who took part know what we have done in meeting their concerns or needs?

Before moving on lets remark upon something.

A real change in this past year has been the wonderful gift from God of many new young families moving into the area and attending services. It is a testimony to the existing church family that, when speaking with these families, they remark what a warm, friendly welcome they receive. I fervently hope that we will continue to build relationships. I also hope all of us will feel able to contribute to this community in one way or another. To this end we are inviting all who have links with the church to respond to a short invitation about caring for the local church so we can build on our great network of contributors. When we have a new picture of our individual callings then God can help us discern what we can offer to one another and to the community.

Moving on now to more ideas for the coming year :

- Study groups. This is an area from last year that, if this was a school report would have 'could do better' beside the topic. So one of the new DCC's jobs will be to discern how we can be a place where faith enquiry, development and support has real expression.
- There is a Sunday a month with nothing in particular for families. Perhaps we could look at what, if anything could be put in place that day.

- Finally there has been much about supporting younger families, adults and children. Would it be possible to think of the rest of our community? The single people, the experienced generation. Is there room for us to develop worship or activities for this part of our family?

As I lay all this before you - please do not feel that this is a list of 'to do's' or a set of demands of myself or you. Rather it is a prayerful response to what God seems to be doing here himself and it is good to take this time to recognise that this past year has been fruitful and blessed in so many ways as we see the many skills and talents we share together.

It is a privilege to serve this church family at St Michael and All Angels and to share in the task of offering the love of God to Beaconsfield. May we offer to God open minds and willing hearts to participate in the work that he has planned for us, what ever it may be.

Thank you.

Camilla Walton
Vicar.