**Rector’s report – April 2019**

Like so much this year, I am new to the art of giving a Rector’s report. What I would like to do is to offer you some personal reflections on the past 11 and a half months and on my future hopes.

Shortly after my appointment was confirmed, I wrote a letter to the PCC, setting out some thoughts on how I saw this new chapter. It’s strange to look back on it now. I was clear at the time that both you and I were embarking on something which would be different.

For me, it felt like going through a door into a strange room. I confess there were moments when I really wondered what I was doing. I recall one Sunday, early on, sitting on my chair, listening to the Epistle, and a wave of what they call “impostor syndrome” came over me. And I imagined two of the nurses at the MRI I have got to know, coming up the side aisle, past the font, and gently taking me by each hand and saying, “I think it’s time for you to come back now.”

But gradually I have got the hang of it, more or less, and settled in. At this point I must thank you all, and especially the wardens, Hilary and Lynda, and Alan as sacristan, for being very patient with me and for showing me what to do. I have had a strong feeling of being really cared for this past year, in lots of small ways – thank you to them and all of you.

Reflecting on what I now do, it’s becoming clear to me that it falls into two main parts. The first is as president and preacher, on Sundays and weekdays. As the months have passed I have become increasingly comfortable in this role, and also as I have got to know many of you individually, it has become more personal. I have come to understand that the liturgical and the pastoral are two expressions of the same vocation.

As the forms of what we do have become more familiar it has become easier to focus more on the content - the meanings we find and express through them. I find the forms we use at Holy Innocents, in their seriousness, their simplicity, the gaps between the words, are carefully crafted to enable these meanings. Form follows content. And form evolves – as Alan pointed out to me, with the benefit of 50 or so years of perspective, things are always changing at Holy Innocents. I look forward to this continuing evolution, as we find ways to give fuller expression to the gospel, ways which are even more fruitful and more beautiful, for all who God is bringing through our doors.

Over the last year I have played a second role, quite distinct from the first. This is in the work we have started on the PCC, stepping back from the day-to-day. Here I have played the role of facilitator, guiding a process whereby we have tried to develop strategy as a group. An important first output from these discussions has been our Vision statement, which I think is a wonderful articulation of all that is best about Holy Innocents – I feel a great responsibility to treasure what it conveys as precious inheritance and future aspiration. I have printed it on the back of my report, please have a read of it. Thank you to the many people who contributed to it.

There are numerous other roles and tasks in which my predecessors were involved which I have not had to worry about – huge amounts of practical work, preparing of services, and music, maintaining and cleaning the building, much of our engagement with St James School, updating the website, Facebook and Twitter, and other things which just happen without my even being aware of them: all of which have been owned by many of you and I thank you for all of it.

Finally, I said in my letter to the PCC that my time with you may be short, and I wanted to help establish a new kind of partnership between Rector and laity which will outlive my time here.

I believe that the traditional, 18th Century model of church leadership will not survive. It is ill-suited to our modern culture, and the Church of England can no longer afford it. But leaving behind a “parent-child” model of leadership I hope can be an opportunity for transformation and growth. I look forward to a time when parish leadership is truly team-based, and I believe here at Holy Innocents we have the opportunity to innovate and develop a model which others in time may choose to follow.

**Holy Innocents**

Here at Holy Innocents we hope you will find:

Space A spiritual space which is calm, uncluttered, cared for and valued

A space of quiet integrity which allows for reflection, contemplation and sometimes exhilaration

Worship A gathering round the bread and wine of the Eucharist

 Music which can soothe, restore and lift the spirit

 Silences which give you time to breathe

 Formal and structured, thoughtfully planned yet relaxed in delivery

 Challenging, respectful of ambiguity and mystery

Social action Inclusive, valuing our difference

 Resisting injustice

 Prayer leading to action in support of others

People A varied mix of every description

 Interested in others

 Emotionally aware, respectful

 Who feel free to be and not do

 A constant in a changing city