

Vicar's Report for the APCM: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021

I've been Vicar of this parish now for 25 years! By today's standards that is a long incumbency, but in fact, it is just a short chapter in the long story of St Martin's, Ruislip. It has been a privilege for me to be part of that story, which stretches back at least to the time of the Norman conquest and further back than that. I think that staying in one place for a while has enabled me to be particularly conscious of the ways in which the culture around us has changed and is continuing to change. In particular, the character of Sunday in this country has changed significantly while I've been here and we can now no longer assume that people in general have even the slightest knowledge of the Christian faith or of the contents of the Bible or of what happens within churches.

In some ways, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1996 feels to me, like yesterday! The years have shot past, but much has happened. We've done a lot together in terms of mission, re-ordering the interior of the church building (twice), developing liturgy with seasonal variations, nurturing young people and adults in the Christian faith, working closely with BWI, BR and our other local schools, developing a variety of lay ministries, training and launching curates into parish ministry, going on pilgrimage and drawing inspiration from visits to Walsingham (our church has more groups visiting Walsingham each year than any other parish in the country!), to the Abbey of Bec with which we have ancient historical and spiritual links, to Taize, to places in and around Tours associated with St Martin, to the Holy Land, Romania and elsewhere; developing partnerships with the Myosotis Trust and its incredible work in Barlad, with the Diocese of Wiawso in Ghana, with St Michael's, Camden Town and more recently, St Anselm's, Hayes; with Harrow Mencap and Harrow Bereavement Support....Most of all I feel a huge sense of gratitude for all the fun we've had and all the love and support I've received as I have tried to serve you and the mission of St Martin's in a rapidly changing culture and a changing world. Undergirding everything has been the steady, life-giving rhythm of prayer: the Daily Office and Mass, with a wonderful number of people participating on weekdays as well as Sundays, as well as the faithful work of the Prayer Support Group.

The twelve months leading up to this APCM, have coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected our lives, our parish, our country and every country of the world in dramatic, difficult, tragic and unforeseen ways. I want to salute the resilience and determination of so many people in the life of St Martin's Church as we have worked together to maintain our worshipping life, pastoral care, communication with the housebound, the livestreaming of services, the ongoing catechesis of adults and children preparing for Confirmation and countless other aspects of our life. Even during the first lockdown, when we were told to shut our doors, a decision that the Archbishop of Canterbury now regrets, our church's porch with its view into the church through the glass doors, remained a place of prayer for countless people of this community. I lost count of the huge number of people in our community who expressed gratitude to me for the fact that there was a place of solace provided for them by their parish church during those difficult and unsettling months. During the subsequent times when worship was suspended, our parish church remained open to the local community. There have been painful bereavements, the loss of freedoms, some people have drifted away from

the church, much of our life has been curtailed, but there are signs of hope and reasons to be optimistic as we look to the future.

As soon as we have been able to do so, we've worked together tirelessly and effectively to re-start public worship in a way that is safe for those who attend. Thank-you everyone who has made this possible. The determination demonstrated here to be open and active stands, sadly and to my mind, shockingly, in stark contrast to many other churches around us who have remained closed, even over Holy Week and Easter. So, thank-you Alan and Mark, our churchwardens; thank-you clergy colleagues, sacristans, servers, musicians, sidesmen, flower arrangers, bell ringers, members of the PCC, Chris Hoppett who steps down now as our treasurer after doing an excellent job for many years; thank-you Jo Wild the Electoral Roll Officer, thanks to those who gather daily for prayer and worship, to all lay pastoral ministers, all lay liturgical ministers, to David Hudson, to Maureen Tinsey and the Outlookers, Gill Dargue, Malcolm Roberts, the Friends of St Martin's and all who in different ways ensure that our life, mission and ministry continues. Thanks too to James Green whose generosity and professionalism has enabled huge numbers of people unable to leave their homes, to participate in the services here via the internet.

The response by our congregation to particular appeals for help during the winter months has also been impressive: I think of the increased support for the foodbank, the response to the asylum seekers appeal, the appeal for food-boxes for families experiencing hardship in winter and the Chromebook appeal for children at BWI school with inadequate resources for home-schooling. Thank-you for the demonstration of so much generosity.

Looking forward to the immediate future, I believe there are three clear mission priorities on which we should focus our energy as we move through the summer and the autumn months of this year:-

- Identifying and reaching out to those people we haven't seen in church during this difficult year, in order to rebuild the Sunday congregations back to full strength. This is a task in which we will *all* have a part to play.
- Rebuilding and perhaps redesigning our ministry to children and young people especially on Sundays, but also in other ways. A strong partnership with BWI School and BR School will be an ingredient in this.
- Identifying and responding to the pastoral needs of the community around us, as the consequences of the pandemic continue to affect the lives of so many in economic ways, as well as through loneliness, isolation, bereavement and other forms of hardship. Re-opening the Thursday lunches will, I hope, be part of this.

On 10<sup>th</sup> July I will be saying farewell and the parish will enter a period of Interregnum. I would like to think that my retirement will be irrelevant in terms of the focus on mission that I hope will continue to drive St Martin's Church through the remainder of this year and beyond. The PCC will appoint two of its members to act as parish representatives, working with the patron and the bishop to find the right person to succeed me. The thoughtful, prayerful, patient and diligent work of the Way Forward Group will be pertinent in this regard. The Way Forward

Group Report which they have now completed is the fruit of their work and will repay careful reading and consideration. There is a tremendously rich spiritual tradition and inheritance here at St Martin's. Let us all commit ourselves to work and pray for the nurturing of its continued development and growth as we seek to respond to the fresh challenges of mission in an increasingly secularised society and the increasingly agenda-driven culture in the Church of England.

Finally, I give thanks to God for the privilege of being your vicar and to you, the people of St Martin's, for all we've done together while I've been here. I will continue to pray for you and for the future life and mission of this church.

May God bless you all,

Fr Simon.