

## **Totnes Mission Community - Team Rectors Annual Report 2018**

This is my thirteenth annual report for the Totnes Mission Community and my eighth year as Rural Dean. I mention the post as Rural Dean in that as such I gain a lot of insight into how other Mission Communities are working within the Diocese and it re-assures me that our Mission Community is alive and well. As in previous years I will give my report under the three headings of Growing in Prayer, Making new Disciples and Serving the people of Devon with Joy.

### **Growing in Prayer.**

Obviously this is central to our lives and indeed how ultimately we share the joys of Christian living. At the heart of what we do is our worship and the Eucharist stands at the centre of this. However, within our team we offer a very broad range of worship which enables us to reach a much wider community with things like Sacred Space, 'The Conversation', and Messy Church at Bridgetown, and Wild & Monastic Church at Dartington. Music continues to play a significant part in this with strong choral traditions in Totnes, Stoke Gabriel and Marldon and it is pleasing that we can offer services like Evensong, where so many other churches cannot.

House groups and Lent courses continue to flourish across the team, but in addition we embarked this year on a series of study days under the heading of 'Exploring our Faith' which were well supported. 'Centring Prayer' courses have also been run, and a number of Quiet Days have proved popular.

Special events and services continue to be a feature with things like Crafty Advent and Crafty Lent at Stoke Gabriel, but also Valentine themed services and the opportunity to renew marriage vows. Posadas has become a feature in a number of our parishes in our build up to Christmas, with figures of Mary and Joseph travelling from home to home and eventually arriving at a Crib service or Christingle completing the scene for Christmas. The Epiphany sponsored walk was originally intended as a means to raise funds for the St John's, Bridgetown windows project, but turned into a wonderful team pilgrimage travelling to our churches with prayers and services offered in them all. Additionally we were able to be part of the Ways with Words festival this year thanks to the hard work of Jane Frost in not only securing a slot in the festival, but also booking John Bell from the Iona Community to be a speaker, and incorporating this with a service and music by the newly formed Ashprington Community choir. Once again we supported the Christian Festival on Vire Island, which is lead by the Totnes United Free Church. The Totnes choir sang a medley of choral pieces to mark the different seasons of the Church year, but also we supported prayer tents and the Bishop of Plymouth was the main speaker.

Our Pastoral Care team continues to flourish, but would welcome new members. Also the Bereavement Group in Stoke Gabriel is now well established.

Unlike many churches we continue to be in demand across the Mission Community for our pastoral services (Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals) which of course is an important means of outreach and mission.

### **Making New Disciples.**

Importantly I begin under this heading with recording the Ordination of Steve Jones. It was a mark of confidence that the Bishop of Plymouth invited our Mission Community to host this, claiming that he knew he could rely on our team to do a good job. We of course did and, along with two fellow curates, Steve was ordained priest at St Mary's in Totnes on 24th September and was well supported from across the team. He celebrated his first Eucharist, as a team service, the following Sunday.

Bishops have featured a lot during this year, initially with Bishop Sarah in January as part of Bishop's in Mission. Whilst her visit was to our Deanery, she was based in Totnes and her final service, a Deanery Eucharist, was at St Mary's. Jan Dietz, the Totnes Director of Music, organised the choirs of the Deanery to make one big choir for this service, which really brought out churches together and generally her visit reached out to so many aspects of our Deanery.

Bishop Nick's visit for the ordination was his second visit to Totnes in the year, having conducted a Confirmation in June. Two of the candidates were mother and daughter from our Junior choir in Totnes, which was a great joy. The Junior choir continues to flourish with parents attending the monthly Family Eucharist which is now well established.

Hospitality is something we are very good at within our Mission Community. The newly formed Community Cafe at Bridgetown, lead by Steve Jones, has proved an instant success and even attracted the notice of the Bishop of Exeter who visited the cafe on Ash Wednesday, which of course was also Valentine's Day, enjoying a Valentine theme for one and all. The Bishop's visit is recorded on the Diocesan news website noting that loneliness is a real problem for many and that such a cafe is so important. However, Bridgetown is not alone in that throughout the summer months a Tuesday coffee morning is available at St Mary's, Totnes, where toasted tea-cakes are much enjoyed feature, Stoke Gabriel in conjunction with the WI offers a monthly tea, cake and board game afternoon, Dartington with its 'cake and chat' meetings, Berry Pomeroy with its 'Fish & Chips and chat' evenings and numerous other mornings, afternoon and evening events from across the Mission Community welcome one and all and are yet another important means of outreach.

Working with young people is something all our churches wish for, but struggle with. However, following last year's Confirmation at Marldon, Jane Frost and Steve Jones have formed a Youth Group which works well with a number of planned visits to places like Buckfast Abbey and Exeter Cathedral, as well as continued Christian teaching and obviously fun and games as well.

Finally, under this heading, I would like pay tribute to my staff team. We demand high standards within our Mission Community and clergy and Readers alike rise to this and we must consider ourselves fortunate to be served so well by them all. However, we must take note that at present we are well staffed, with two curates, who will not be with us for ever and whilst I would hope we continue to be seen as a good training parish and hopefully will have future curates we collectively need to look at ways where we can all play a part in serving our communities when staff numbers are depleted.

### **Serving the people of Devon with Joy**

Some years ago one of the Diocesan Resource officers helped our staff team look at our Mission Action Plan and indeed what we were doing generally as a Mission Community. His most significant comment was to note that we seemed to have so much going on. He suggested that we might reduce this and do some things really well, but to be honest we felt that everything we were doing was important and that the range of things in worship and leisure provided an open door to every one.

It might seem a funny things to include under serving people with joy, but it is important to have safe and well appointed buildings.

One of my biggest concerns, as in previous years, has been ensuring we get the balance right between looking after our buildings and making them what they should be to serve today's expectations, and actually worshipping and serving our communities. Building wise I pay tribute to all who work so hard to ensure funds are raised and works are completed on our churches. This year Cornworthy has restored its bells and in the process of doing this has attracted some new ringers. Stoke Gabriel is on the brink of completing the South Porch development with cloakroom facilities and servery. Bridgetown is hopefully on the brink of replacing the North and South side windows and upgrading the catering and cloakroom facilities. Other churches have also had more general maintenance to keep things in good order and St Mary's in Totnes has completed its consultation process in relation to restoration and re-ordering, which has proved a valuable means of outreach.

I have already mentioned a lot of things under other headings that serve with joy and generally I believe all our churches are welcoming and that we really do seek to reach out and serve, but there is never any room for complacency. In fact it should be our constant joy to want to share the love of God with others and I think we do.

Two big events that I believe serve our communities with joy are Party in the Town and Sea Change. These are two big events centred around music, St Mary's in Totnes, being one of the main venues for these and attracting literally hundreds of people and generating a great deal of good will. But in addition to this I am aware of so many well run services, concerts, fetes and fairs, quizzes and so much more that really show our Mission Community is at the heart of our communities.

Looking beyond what we do in our churches, I am very conscious of how as a whole we seek to support the Totnes Drop in centre, the Food Bank, Freedom Centre Totnes and our Street Pastors and whilst I feel we should pay tribute to Liz Waterson, who does so much to support and co-ordinate these, I know she is both grateful and proud of the way all our churches support such work.

Finally, I have to mention Safeguarding. In serving with joy we need to make sure we have safeguarding properly in place and I am grateful to those who have taken this on board as a Safeguarding officers for each church. However, the important phrase that needs to be taken on board is that we all have a duty of care and a part to play in securing the well being of vulnerable adults and children. Pleasingly, I think we do take this seriously, but we do need to be ever vigilant.

To finish I wish to re-echo the word of last year and say thank you. There are no words to express my gratitude to all the officers our churches, as wardens, treasurers, secretaries, PCC members, organists, choirs, sidespeople, vergers, sacristans, safeguarding officers and all the other functions that many of you readily and quietly take on. I also count my blessings for the amazing staff team who do far too much and yet readily support me and the parishes with such care. But my thanks really extends to everyone, who in being part of our Church, keep the presence of Christ alive and well. It is such a joy to be Team Rector of such a team and, as always, I look to the future with real optimism.

Julian Ould.

Totnes Team Rector.