

St Andrew's Church Report - April 2023-24

Having only been in post from the final six weeks of 2023, I am grateful to our PCC colleagues who have updated me on the activities of the church over the last year.

Firstly, I should record grateful thanks for the ministry of Revd Canon Simon Pitcher over almost 12 years in the team of churches. Simon moved to the Benefice of Lavenham and Preston St. Mary in February and his time as Team Rector in Sole Bay was celebrated with a farewell service on 26th February.

The time of vacancy that followed could have seemed rather uncertain, but the churches continue to be blessed by the steady hand of Revd Alan Perry as Team Vicar and our wonderful 'retired' clergy who ensured the service pattern was maintained throughout.

The work to consolidate the views of the parishes regarding the appointment of the next Team Rector, preparing the parish profile, advertising, and arranging the interviews was a mammoth task and I am grateful for the comprehensive view of the role that was provided. This has ensured that, for the most part, I had a good idea what I was coming to.

The organisation of the Licensing and Installation Service in November and the warmth of welcome from all the churches has been wonderful.

I am grateful to the work of our PCC both during this time and now and to those who open the church daily, clean and care for the building, decorate it with flowers, tend the churchyard, provide our music and refreshments.

I have been encouraged to see St Andrews is open daily and by all that happens in our church, whether on Sundays or throughout the weekdays. We have a range of service styles which attract anything from 12-180 people with villagers and visitors packing out the church for the Easter Sunday, Christmas Carols by Candlelight and Crib services.

We have developed an informal all age service with pre service refreshments on the fourth Sunday of the month. The theme is God's Creation and services will be held in various locations around the village to reflect this.

Our pop-up musical "Sing a Long a Joseph" generously led by Ben Skipp and his musically talented team scheduled to be held in the ruins, was not thwarted by the rain as more than 150 packed into the church in August.

Families enjoyed creating clay designs during National Heritage Open Days in September while cyclists participating in the National Churches Ride and Stride checked themselves in and enjoyed the peace and beauty of the building.

We celebrated four weddings and two christenings, shared thanksgiving and pain with families at four funerals and bought a goat for a village in India and twinned the St Andrew's WC with one in Rwanda.

The Warm Café, which began post Covid and later became the Community Café, provided a welcoming space for tea, cake and conversation for villagers and visitors. All who came were touched by the gift of free refreshments and friendship. This has now become a church coffee morning at the home of a PCC member for times of reminiscence about the village.

On Wednesday afternoons during term time a ladies group meets for fellowship and friendship.

Last month St Andrew's Church achieved bronze award level in a national Eco Church initiative, a UK, denomination-wide, charitable project provides a framework and inspiration for congregations taking positive, practical action in caring for our environment as a faith response to climate change. There are four new bird boxes, new hedging, a wildflower walkway as well as opportunities for you and your families to be involved in building bug hotels, volunteer in the new graveyard management scheme or enjoy the peace in the new Labyrinth.

We are immensely grateful to the newly formed Friends of St Andrews for their programme of wonderful and inspirational musical events held to support the fabric of our beautiful building. Thanks to their generosity we will be able to upgrade the PA equipment and systems to provide more flexibility for future indoor and outdoor entertainment.

This year specialist contractors will be appointed for essential repairs to the church exterior wall. The estimated cost is £20-£30K so funding will be sought from trusts and individuals. We remain appreciative of the generosity of our village. Like everyone, we are facing increased utility costs and the impact of these will be available in our Treasurer's report given at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting on Sunday 19 May.

We are grateful for the many benefits St Andrew's gains from being part of the eight strong Sole Bay community of churches. Stand-alone churches with an incumbent for every parish are a thing of the past. For several years geographically close churches have been brought together into benefices for mutual benefit which includes church organists, clergy and administration and support.

May our church continue to be a place of all-embracing welcome, prayerfulness for the needs of the community, diversity of worship, commitment to sacrificial service and generous giving.

Revd Russ Gant – Team Rector

April 2024