

## A few words from the Vicar ....

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*



Last month I mentioned that the number of stipendiary clergy available for allocation to parishes is falling rapidly. In 1963 there were 15,446 full-time stipendiary clergy within the Church of England. By 2012 the number had fallen by 50% to 7798 and, with 64% of us over 50, will rapidly fall still further in the years to come.

Should we despair? Is this the end of the Church of England? The answer is, of course, no to both of these questions?

A few decades ago there were predictions that the world would run out of oil round about now; well there's still plenty left!

And do you remember the Millennium bug scare in the run up to 2000? There were dire predictions of planes falling from the sky because it was said on board computers couldn't cope with the date change from 1999 to 2000. Well, nothing of the sort happened because those IT systems that were vulnerable were modified. Mind you, it was a nice little earner for consultants at the time.

The same goes for any other dire projections reported in the press from time to time. God has made us in such a way that, as a species, we humans are incredibly adaptable.

So what about the Church of England? Well, I don't have a crystal ball but I'm sure we'll adapt. Sure, there aren't enough clergy boots on the ground for things to continue as they are. Nonetheless, as the *Church Times* said recently, 'To put it bluntly, there are no longer enough troupers left to keep the show on the road, *and the show will have to change.*' (My emphasis.)

Indeed, things have already changed; the days of 'Vicar says' and parish visiting ('more tea vicar') have long gone. Team Ministry, where parishes come together to share ministers, is increasingly becoming the norm. We have known for years that, sooner or later, this parish will become part of a team. Indeed, if ongoing discussions with our neighbours in Radcliffe are fruitful, sooner rather than later.

And, with stipendiary clergy more thinly spread, the successful churches of the future will be those that change their focus from maintenance to mission, where ministry is exercised collaboratively between clergy and laity, and where mission and evangelism are no longer seen as the preserve of the clergy and other specialist church workers (i.e. the Church Army). A cultural change no less that acts upon the fact that all of us are called through our baptism into some sort of ministry within the Church; a cultural change that puts into practice our calling to be a priesthood of all believers.

Collaborative ministry is already strong in this parish and we are fortunate that so many of our number volunteer in so many ways to support the work of the Church. There are too

many to mention but the above picture – the Churchyard team at play – is just one example of the many ways in which individuals support the work of this Church.

Our congregation is currently growing. However, recent Church of England study shows that a single church with one leader is more likely to grow than a church grouped together with other churches. The more churches amalgamate together, the greater the risk of decline. Therefore, I can't help worrying that we will stop growing when we become part of a team.

So I hope and pray that we will buck the trend and will continue to grow whatever the future holds for us. But we can only buck the trend if each of us mucks in and takes seriously our God-given call to ministry.

Every Blessing

*Dave*