

THE ELY VILLAGES
INTERIM PRIEST-IN-CHARGE'S REPORT
2023

The Deanery

Four months into my appointment here, I was asked to be the Rural Dean of Ely, which has enabled me to be involved in most of all the relevant decision-making committees, and thus helped deliver the primary purpose of my work here in finding a model of ministry and mission that is affordable, sustainable, realistic and effective.

In achieving this within the time-frame, I wish to give thanks here for all the hard work of deanery synods reps, deanery mission and pastoral committee reps, and the deanery secretary *Sarah Woodbridge*, who has gone the extra-mile to bring to the January 2024 synod the **Deanery Plan 2024** now approved and also endorsed by the Archdeaconry of Huntingdon & Wisbech Mission & Pastoral Committee. For the eleven parishes here we are forming 'The Isle of Ely Villages Team Ministry' with two stipendiary clergy, and now await the Bishop's Council and the draft Pastoral Scheme being formally launched, with each parish being finally consulted. A Pastoral Measure Section 11 meeting for all our PCCs together is currently being planned for late April to enable us to agree the Benefice Profile and arrangements for advertising the vacancies.

Alongside this I was asked if we could build on Mark Rodel's earlier work with what began life as 'focal ministry' and is now a diocesan policy entitled 'Authorised Local Leadership' (or ALL); in this we are one of three 'early-adopters' across the diocese. The clear need and therefore our aim is that we look to discern God's will in each parish for those who might work with the stipendiary clergy in more effective ministry and mission, close to the ground. As another diocese has written. "Oversight ministry, where it is coupled with effective local leadership, can provide better accountability and support; it must however not come at the expense of local believers knowing they are cared for." This aspect is not lost on us, and pastoral care remains a top priority within our structural reorganisation.

As Rural Dean of Ely, with Lay Chair *Elizabeth Stazicker*, and a strong representative standing committee, the other 3 benefices and the cathedral have been led and encouraged. With particular responsibilities for convening the clergy Chapter (and into 2024 also all licensed lay ministers and retired clergy with the Bishop's Permission to Officiate), Revd Canon *Jeremy James* has continued in his role of Assistant Rural Dean

Staffing

On your behalf I would like to thank my **colleagues**.....all the ALMs, LLMs, and the many clergy with PTO who have officiated or presided and preached for us as part of the nearly 30no. from across the deanery.

Sara Millward at Stretham and *Claire McGinley* at Little Thetford have trained for Anna Chaplaincy with its focus on ministry to the elderly, *Claire* having added this, as well as ALM Preacher, to her existing ALM Pastoral. *Sarah Martin* at Little Thetford has been commissioned as ALM Pastoral, and *Shirley Jenkins* at Downham has refreshed her ALM Worship Leader and ALM Pastoral.

Revd Jill Stimpson has been signed off at the end of her 3 year curacy and will be staying with us as an assistant priest. In thanking *Revd Denise Youngs* as Jill's 'training incumbent', in the Grunty Fen Group of parishes, we record with sadness her stepping back now from officiating having decided not to seek renewal of her Bishop's PTO.

From Sutton, Mepal & Witcham we bade farewell to *Revd Andy Elliott* and *Kristi* as they moved to Shetland for Andy to take up his curacy there at Burravoe on Yell, the benefice being within the Diocese of Aberdeen & Orkney in the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Juliette, an ordinand from Chatteris was with us on attachment during Holy Week.

Worship

I inherited each sub-grouping of the Ely Villages being self-determining as to staffing of weekly Sunday worship, which has ensured regular continuity and for which we give thanks. I have been glad to play my own part in this but regretting the inability to sequence more than one each Sunday morning owing to similarity of times rendering two rarely possible; this then is an area we need to look at for the future, and also to hopefully enjoy the larger gatherings thereby, also looking at Sunday afternoon and evening worship possibilities. Our link with the cathedral is strong, who are able to 'loan out' their Readers to us, as well it being a place of resource for the whole deanery. We were glad to be there on Easter Eve, presenting Confirmation candidates (having jointly prepared them with Canon James Reveley) and kindling our paschal candles within the liturgy of Holy Saturday. I was also honoured to be preaching at the cathedral Remembrance Sunday afternoon Eucharist.

My particular thanks to the various musicians in all our churches, and to our churchwardens, sides(wo)men, and others who maintain the quality in our preparing for, and welcoming of, people for worship. I was glad to invite chalice assistants to two training/refresher evenings at Haddenham and Coveney; all have been given certificates (and a 'user-guide') enabling them to

do so in any of our parishes for the next 5 years, and in some cases administering Home Communion, with some also keen to also serve as sacristans and servers.

Schools and College

We are involved in collective worship and chaplaincy at all of our 8 primary schools (3 Foundation, 2 DEMAT, and 3 County/Academy), and have begun a relationship with Witchford Village College. In this ministry I take a particular lead realising the vital importance and privilege in sharing faith and worship with so many young people. Alongside this, we are rolling out the innovative diocesan Parish-School Covenant, which is being extended to non-Foundation schools too. By virtue of my office I am ex-officio Foundation Governor at all our Church schools, but am de facto not physically able to serve on that number of governing bodies.

Communications

We again owe a great debt of thanks to both *Helen Carter* (Grunty Fen), *Fiona Wilson* (Sutton, Mepal & Witcham) for their weekly pewsheets, also *Jo Hamilton* (Mepal), *Jen Hilton-Thomas* (Stretham), and *Sarah Martin* (Little Thetford) for their monthly parish newsletters, and *Rosemary Westwell* (Witchford) for her quarterly newssheet. We are glad to be able to contribute monthly pastoral letters in 'Village Voice' (Haddenham & Wilburton), Sutton 'Pepperpot', The Parish Magazine (Little Downham & Coveney), Little Thetford's village monthly, Mepal Matters, and WhatsoninWitcham.

To encourage mutual support, we have continued to hold periodic 'Ministry Team' meetings, usually comprising churchwardens and those who regularly lead worship, and I held three drop-in autumn coffee mornings at The Rectory for the latter.

We held a PCC 'AwayDay' at Wentworth to discuss our future plans, hopes and fears, and at the same venue were glad to welcome Cazzy Walshe from Granta Vale Benefice who spoke to us about her work as benefice (and safeguarding) administrator for their seven parishes.

We encourage all our PCC members (and others) to sign up for the weekly diocesan Ministry Mailing to keep abreast of training opportunities and church events.

Devotional & Teaching

There are a number of Bible and other study groups in our parishes.

By way of widening our horizons I have launched two pilgrimages; September 2024 to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne off the Northumberland coast (where

some of us went in early October this year) and the Isle of Iona in the Inner Hebrides in spring 2025. I would be very glad if these are at all helpful and of interest to folk here.

Under God, my thanks to everyone for their continued enthusiasm and involvement, and also their forbearance in what I hope are those few areas where we have perhaps fallen short of expectations.

Rev'd Canon Mark Haworth, March 2024