**Church Wardens Report 2023 – 2024**

The key challenge during 2023 was to continue the management and operation of St Martin’s during the interregnum following the retirement of Rev Ian Wilson. St Martin’s worked closely with the other 7 churches in the benefice to develop a Parish Profile and ultimately this was successful as the Benefice/Diocese were able to appoint Rev Nick Williams to the post of Rector in December 2023. It was intended that a new Rectory would be provided in Bucklesham although this was ultimately not possible owing to historic planning restrictions. The interregnum has had the effect of drawing the churches more closely together mainly through the joint work required to develop the parish profile. Coffee and biscuits and high quality cakes continue to be available after services and I believe this is an important part of our fellowship.

A key loss this year was the unexpected death of our very longstanding organist Mr Malcolm Gee. Fortunately Malcolm recorded many hymns onto the electronic organ and we have been able to play these at services since January 2024. A longer term solution may be to hand as the Rector has purchased a hymnal devise. We just need to learn how to use it.

The church has enjoyed some successes this year. Schools including Nacton CofE primary school and Orwell Park have maintained their use of the church and this has been noted by the diocese. In addition we have continued to run a ‘Messy Church’ events at different times of the year. During the interregnum the church received significant support from Rev Chris Hood, the rural dean which helped to maintain the regular run of services.

The church has run two very successful events in the village hall. The pre-Christmas ‘Bazar’ and the post - Christmas ‘Soup and Sweet’ events filled the village hall to capacity. We have become smarter in terms of our event marketing with continued use of leafleting and better use of WhatsApp to engage a range of people within the village and beyond. Holding events like this are not only a demonstration of faith but also a practical way of enabling people to reconnect with friends and communities outside their normal circle. Rev Nick Williams has been an active supporter of these events.

The Church has worked in partnership with other local organisations and this resulted in two events ‘Travelers Tails’ and A Christmas Carol. The former was an exhibition by local people of journeys and special memories. It was creative, deeply meaningful and proved popular with both exhibitors and visitors. The second was a performance of the famous Dickens story in the church and again was very popular. Collaborative events are something we will continue to engage with as they invite many people into the church who are not regular attenders.

I would like to record my thanks to the PCC for its solid support with everyone giving what they can be it their time or their talents.

A key challenge this year has been the cost of heating. In very round terms it costs us about £100 to heat the church for each service. In response to this challenge the PCC has actively investigated the possibility of installing pew heaters and we hope to make an application to the diocese in the late spring for their instillation. The majority of funding for this project will come from bequests.

Church flowers have continued to be provided throughout the year with terrific displays at Easter and particularly over Christmas. We are fortunate to have a skilled group of volunteers who unseen provide displays that enhance and brighten St Martin’s.

I would also like to thank the group of volunteers who open and close the church 7 days a week throughout the year. In addition the hidden group of people who regularly clean the church on a weekly basis.

**Safety**

Safeguarding procedures have continued to be maintained by the safeguarding officer and safeguarding training is maintained. Our safeguarding officer is through in chasing up those people in need of training and maintaining records.

The First Aid equipment has been reviewed updated and replaced as per current guidelines.

**Building Maintenance**

The church appears to be in good condition. Regular maintenance is carried out as required however we are due a quinquennial inspection which like most churches we anticipate with some trepidation however the PCC has set aside a building fund in anticipation.

From a health and safety perspective we have no major issues or accidents to report. The Church Warden has renewed his First Aid Certificate however it would be useful if there were another qualified First Aider to cover periods when he is not attending a service.

**Churchyard**

Previous planting of bulbs has meant that the churchyard benefits from a terrific display of daffodils in the early spring. The planting was carried out by members of the congregation on a rainy day in September but the effort was worthwhile.

The churchyard continues to be available for burials and the interment of ashes. There has been a significant uptick in the number of burials this year. Hopefully this is not a trend!