

ST NICOLAS CHURCH ANNUAL REPORT 2024  
VICAR'S REPORT

**Introduction:**

During the past year I have observed a vibrancy in our congregation which has been building up over some time for which we thank God. Thank you to each one of you for the contribution you make to our common life. In this report I should like to make particular mention of the following:

*1. Finances and Blacknall Memorial Restoration:*

We are hugely blessed to have in Jenny Metcalfe a very able, diligent and meticulous treasurer who works so hard and has taken significant steps since she entered the role to present financial reports to the District Church Council (DCC) which are thorough and accessible to us. I do want to thank Jenny, on behalf of us all.

Jenny has worked very hard on an additional project throughout the year in consultation with the Churchwardens, DCC, and the diocese to enable restoration to take place on the Blacknall Memorial. This has been a large task. You can read about it in the Churchwarden's report but it does need a mention from me to offer thanks for the great progress and what has been accomplished. We wanted as much done as possible to coincide with the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Blacknall's death. This will be marked by a service of Evensong on Thursday 21 August at which Bishop Gavin of Dorchester will preach. Work on that service has already been considered at the time of writing and after Easter more detailed and final arrangements will be made. It is mentioned elsewhere in this Annual Report, so in further drawing attention to it here, I am giving you the perfect opportunity of putting the date in your diaries!

*2. Bowles Lecturer – The Revd Josh Brocklesby*

After a significant gap, following the leaving of The Revd Dr Emma Percy, her successor Josh Brocklesby was able to preach at our Patronal Choral Evensong at the end of the year. It was good that Josh was able to come for that occasion and not simply meet our congregation, but people from the wider parish.

The Bowles Lecturer has a long established agreement with us to preside and/or preach on a Sunday once a term each academic year. I am keen, if not concerned, that this is revived, and shall be in regular contact with Josh to do as much as I can to ensure that this happens. I think that at present we are very much on a journey so do please pray that a relationship can be well nurtured in this respect. I have reminded Josh to send in his availability for the next rota, and in addition, offered an invitation for him to preach at our Parish Eucharist on Ascension Day, Thursday 29 May.

### *3. Ministerial Colleagues*

#### *a) Team Rector's retirement*

At the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in April, the Revd Dr Charles Miller, our Team Rector, of eighteen years, announced his retirement with effect from 30 November 2024.

There was a special occasion on 22 September, held at the Hilton Hotel, Abingdon, by way of a lunch, where Charles was able to say farewell to us, and we to him. Speeches were made and a presentation of a retirement gift was made. It was a good and memorable occasion which met Charles' need to say farewell on a different occasion from leading his final act of worship which he was keen to keep separate.

Charles' took a final service both here and at St Michael's on a Sunday during the autumn. But his final service took place on All Saints Sunday, 3 November, when he presided and preached at an afternoon Sung Eucharist in St Helen's for the last time. The church was packed with parishioners but also many others including former colleagues, family and friends. It was a fitting service which he had prepared with the support of Fr AKMA and it ended with a shared tea.

We do wish a long, blessed and rich retirement after his many years of priestly ministry, not just in Abingdon, but in other places before us.

#### *b) Team Colleagues and Honorary Clergy and LLM's*

From the beginning of November we found ourselves working hard towards significant occasions and not least plans for Christmas. Remembrance Sunday was a week following Charles' final service and I had the privilege, and joy, of officiating and preaching at the Civic Service in St Helen's followed by the Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial. This was my first time in this position, and supported by St Helen's Churchwardens, Margaret Horton and David Pope, the service went well. For a November day, while it was certainly damp and very grey and chilly, I was relieved that the weather was as good as it was.

Christmas went well although immediately following our Carol Service I lost my voice and the next day found myself virtually unable to speak. I was sorry therefore not to be able to be with you for Christmas itself and I am very grateful to the husband of our Associate Archdeacon who stepped in at very short notice to preside and preach at Holy Communion on Christmas morning.

At this point, I want to extend my deepest thanks to Fr AKMA, and the Revd Dr Jen Brown, for their collegial support and hard work. Their contribution as Associate Priests in our parish is significant and it is a privilege and joy to be working with them as colleagues during this time of vacancy.

We are also hugely blessed with many Honorary Clergy who serve us in retirement with Permission to Officiate (PTO). Their willingness to serve us so generously cannot be underestimated and we benefit particularly from their ministry here at St Nic's: a group of people with wide-ranging gifts which feed us regularly.

In addition, in our own Sue Holligan, and also Gwen Bevington, we are well served by two Licensed Lay Ministers with PTO and I want to offer my thanks to them both for what they bring to us. We also have in Beryl Clements a very able and stimulating preacher, in her role as an Authorized Preacher, and it is always good to have her preach on Sundays.

Concluding Remarks

#### *Appointment of Team Rector*

While the process of appointing a Team Rector is a long one, I want to assure you that a huge amount of work has been going on in the background, and from the time of Charles' retirement.

The PCC have worked very hard. A Parish Profile has now been completed by a small group and approved by PCC. This is a weighty document and once approved by the diocese should be attractive to many candidates: at least I would be very surprised (and disappointed) if this were not the case. With a carefully crafted timetable, we should be interviewing candidates in June. Assuming, by faith, that we are successful in making an appointment, it is unlikely that the successful candidate will be licensed and inducted until the Autumn at the earliest.

#### *The Revd Christopher Seaman RIP*

On the last day of December, our friend Christopher, died suddenly but peacefully, at Bridge House where he had been living for just over a year. A beautiful funeral service took place here in January.

During the years when he was active in retirement he presided at the altar, often with Pauline his wife preaching, and we are grateful for the ministry he offered to us and for his infectious sense of humour. As we give thanks for his life, we offer Pauline our deepest sympathy, and pray that Christopher may rest in peace.

#### *Thank you*

Finally, I do want to offer my sincere thanks to Eluned and Paul for their hard work as Churchwardens. This role is time consuming and demanding, not least in an interregnum when there is even more to do. I want to say thank you to them from me, and on behalf of us all.

May God continue to bless us in this congregation and parish.

*The Revd Paul Smith, Vicar, 3 April 2025*