

## APCM Report 2011

Thank you, all of you, for the hard work, care and thoughtfulness with which you serve our parish. And thank you, too, for the welcome we have received since arriving here in November. It is only 5 months since we moved in and I already feel very at home. I have been working hard to get to spend some time with each of you and to learn everyone's names since I started here – I haven't quite managed to get to all of you yet but I will!

I want to start by sharing some of my first impressions and experiences since coming here. I have been very struck by the openness and warmth of your welcome both to me but also to visitors. It fills me with hope that, as we reach out to our local community I know people will find a warm welcome here. You have been willing to look at new ideas and consider different possibilities. Some churches seem to specialise in that 'over my dead body' mentality which makes any prospect of change or development so difficult: I haven't found that here amongst you. We are an active group of people with lots going on and most people trying to play their part. There is a fantastic spread of people involved in so many areas of church life. I've probably missed a few but here are some of them:

We have 2 Readers in Andy and Betty who give so much of their time and energy to our churches and I have been so grateful for their support and wisdom. We have superb Wardens and a really hard working PCC, including a willing and co operative secretary, treasurer and giving secretary. We have people who will read lessons in church and lead prayers; we have flower arrangers and people who sort out posters and notice boards; we have people who offer their musical gifts and I am thrilled that we were able to sing an anthem at the Confirmation under Sandra's leadership. And I might say you all sing up really well in church! We have quantities of Sides people; we have people who clean our churches and halls and who take bookings. The grounds of both churches are a delight to behold and that is down both to church members and also others from our local community. We have Bible study leaders and people who offer hospitality; we have people who do a great job at making tea and providing refreshments. The monthly Ploughman's lunch is superb. We have a men's group and a women's group who support and encourage one another. We have an excellent monthly magazine, we have fairs and bazaars, social events and a young people's group. Isn't it great?!

Above all I have found here an attitude of openness, tolerance and kindness which is really Christian. Your encouragement and appreciation and your patience as I get the hang of things has made such a difference to me: I am so grateful to you. And I will never get over the effort that went into sorting out the Rectory garden...that really was a miracle.

What else? I have been encouraged in the past months as we have been able to deepen our links with the local primary schools and the pre-school. It was great, wasn't it, to see the uniformed organisations in church on Mothering Sunday?

The vestry repairs here at St Andrew's are nearing completion and well done to Keith for pushing that on and getting it sorted. Obviously we must continue to care for our buildings: the churches, the halls and our churchyard and see them as gifts from God for our mission in this parish. And we have had two lovely church cleaning days – I was so proud that so many of you came and mucked in.

We saw a good response at Christmas in spite of the weather and saw the value of putting invitation leaflets through doors. Our publicity group is looking at what works and what doesn't. A particular thank you to Linda for the beautiful display she has done in St Andrew's porch.

Our Lent Groups have seen many of us learning and sharing our faith together. It has been great to hear about each other's experiences of God. After Easter I'm delighted to say, we will be having 3 new monthly groups. And we will put the details further on in the magazine. Do feel that growing in faith and understanding is for every Christian: you are all welcome.

One of the highlights for me since coming here has been in setting up our young people's group. They ask such interesting questions and we do have fun. Obviously we have a bit of a lack of children at present on a normal

Sunday morning! A number of you have been talking with me about doing some work to reach out to families with children. I'm happy to say that we expect to start a new venture on June 19<sup>th</sup> at 4pm at St Peter's! We will probably call it Messy Church...a combination of church and Sunday School, especially for people who are used to neither! So for an hour we will offer craft activities, some simple worship and a cup of tea and cake. We will need everyone to be praying for this venture and everyone looking out for family, friends and neighbours to invite. And we will need a good team of willing volunteers. So this is something that everyone in both our churches can do their bit for.

So that's something for us to be planning and looking ahead to. In the coming months we will also be seeking to sort out some really clear priorities and goals for us to work for together, with everyone finding their part to play. And, if you are someone who knows God has called you to pray (and even if you are not!), please be praying very hard. Pray that we will discern God's priorities for the years to come and pray that we will use our time and energy on *his* work, not just on our bright ideas!

Finally we thank God for the encouragement of 9 confirmation candidates and a visit from our Diocesan Bishop on Easter Sunday! I believe that God is very much at work among us stirring us to new faith, new projects, new ideas to reach out with his love. We all have something to offer, some area of mission in which we can share. These are exciting days so do pray for wisdom, energy and joy as we work together to serve God in Shoebury and share his love with all those we come into contact with.

So thank you for all the encouragement and support you have been giving. I'm enjoying working here with you and am looking forward to all that God has for us in the coming months.

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord God Almighty. Zechariah 4.6*

With love,

**Louise.**