

Our Benefice Vision *for 2020 and beyond...*

God continues to be very good to us! Building on the progress made in 2018, last year, as a benefice, we held many moving and memorable festival services which were very well-attended and received. Also, in 2019, we put on plenty of special events, celebrations and concerts across the benefice. Thank you to everyone who helped make these happen.



Whilst it's impossible for me to cover all the good news stories from the past twelve months, here are just a few of the highlights.

- ☆ Who will ever forget our Family Service for Mothering Sunday, when All Saints Church was decorated with “Our Mums” bunting painted by the children of Mears Ashby school? The poems and “thank you” notes were adorable.
- ☆ On Good Friday morning, Overstone Church was filled with young children and their families having fun exploring the story of Holy Week and Easter, all thanks to our craft and prayer activities. Messy Easter was such a hit!
- ☆ Later in April, we enjoyed a delicious St. George's Supper in Sywell Village Hall. It was a delightful evening of friendship and fellowship for both our villages.
- ☆ In Hardwick Church, in June, we had a special Farewell Service for Lynda and Chris Denny as they prepared to move north to Yorkshire. The church was filled with family and friends wanting to say a BIG “Thank You” to them both.
- ☆ With the organ restored, Tony Edwards and our 4 Villages Community Choir gave us a wonderful “thank you” concert in Hardwick Church in October. On display were the church registers going back to the 16th Century.

☆ On the weekend of 7-8 December 2019, Sywell Church was a glorious and glittering delight thanks to groups and schools and organisations from our two villages. It was - of course - our first ever Christmas Tree Festival, and the villagers loved it! Who will ever forget the Lady Wantage Christmas Tree?



☆ Around 650 adults and children celebrated Christmas with us, at our school services, carol services, Messy Christingles, and communion services.

I wonder what are your favourite memories of 2019?



Advent - Christmas - Epiphany - Lent - Holy Week - Easter - Pentecost - Harvest - Remembering our Loved Ones - Remembrance - Patronals, our Church Year is full of special occasions. All of them opportunities to invite villagers to come and celebrate with us, and to meet with God in his church. In 2020, we will continue invite villages to come to their church on festival and special occasions, including building on our relationships with each of the village schools and Overstone Mums & Tots.

What we have planned for 2020...

In addition to continuing to grow and enhance our church festivals and seasonal services, in 2020, with God's guidance, we will also:

a) **Take Church outdoors**

In each of our villages, we are blessed with being close to nature, surrounded as we are by woodland and fields, parkland and lakes. It's why people love living here. Inspired by the National Trust's idea of **50 things to do before you're 11 ¾**, as part of our outreach to families with children, we're going to take church outdoors in 2020:



With a family walk to Little Woods followed by a picnic in April/May (Mears Ashby).

With a Messy Church goes Outdoors at Pentecost 2020, getting close to nature through creative and fun activities (Overstone).

We're also exploring the possibility of holding a celebration service at Hannah Payne RDA in September 2020.

b) **Go out and meet with our farmers**

Whilst our Harvest Services are hugely popular, few of our farmers come to them. During 2020, I'm going to go out and meet with as many of the local farmers as possible, so that I can listen to what's on their hearts and minds and explore how we - as a church - can be there for them.

c) **Reach out to the people moving into Overstone Leys**

We will continue to welcome families and individuals as they move into the new homes on Overstone Leys. As the major development alongside the A43 begins to take shape, we will build a relationship with the lead developers to understand what community amenities are going to be provided and when.

As the estate develops, we will reach out and offer Messy Church and/or Outdoor Church, and seasonal services on the Leys.

d) Commemorate VE and VJ 75 and work for peace

On Sunday 10 May 2020 at 6pm, we will be holding a service to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day in All Saints Church. As well as remembering the day when the guns fell silent across Europe, we will also be praying for world peace.

In August 2020, we will mark the 75th anniversary of VJ Day.

e) Care for our church buildings

During 2020, we will be working on two major projects: at Sywell, we'll be installing our new lead roofs and, at Hardwick, work will begin on the restoration of the Village Hall. Our vision for Hardwick is to become a place where local churches can come for quiet days, whilst continuing to be at the heart of village and benefice life.

f) Explore how we can live out our faith in our daily lives

During 2020, we will be thinking about how God is calling us to live our daily lives in the light of his love. How does our faith shape who we are Monday to Saturday, and how we approach life's challenges with love and joy and peace in our hearts? How is God's love for his creation reflected in our own care for Planet Earth, in our lifestyle? How can we help families - our own and those in our church schools - to live by the beautiful words of God's greatest commandment?

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Our homes, schools and workplaces are where God is found in us, and his love is shared through our loving and caring lives.

Please hold this Vision and our plans for 2020 in your prayers. And, remember, whilst we sow the seeds, it is God who makes them grow.