

Rector's Report 2024

(Reporting on Jan-Dec 2023)



FOLLOWING JESUS

Sharing the journey

WITH THE VILLAGES OF MULBARTON,
FLORDON, BRACON ASH AND HETHEL

Our vision statement, adopted in 2017, "following Jesus, sharing the journey" continues to inspire and anchor, and is a good measuring stick with which to weigh strategic decisions about how best to channel available resources.

Regular worship services, and special seasonal services continue to attract fair numbers, with regular worshippers numbering some 120 or so across all four villages, and special events seeing well over 1000 people in total through the doors. We cater for a wide range of styles and preferences, using a range of resources to create worship spaces for all to find a spiritual home: to reset, recharge, re-encounter God, make friends, and to access pastoral, personal and practical support. We mostly follow the Church of England lectionary in our exploration of the Bible through and between church seasons.

We continue to have a strong focus on community work, facilitating the Community Choir and Mulbarton Mardlers; offering the Food Pantry in Mulbarton church porch and the benefice hardship fund, which has helped well over 20 households who have appreciated the boost through difficult times. We partner with the local social prescriber, the school and others, to help identify those in need. We also partner with various other groups in the villages to help our neighbours in whatever ways we can, mostly with volunteer support. The Church Council appointed me for another term as trustee for the Mulbarton Village Hall Charity. We were pleased that the First Aid training was so popular, and have secured funding to facilitate another two training days.

We have developed our work with EcoChurch and Fairtrade. Hethel has Silver Award EcoChurch and now Mulbarton has been making changes with churchyard management and other things in order to secure at least Bronze Award very soon. Mulbarton is now also fully Fairtrade in terms of supplies for cleaning, refreshments, etc.

In 2023, we worked with about 60 volunteers who required some level of safeguarding training and checking. The national safeguarding framework for the Church of England was radically overhauled, and we worked hard to continue to make best efforts to bring ourselves fully into line with this, a work that is ongoing in 2024. The good neighbour "heart of Mulbarton" volunteer group has wound down for now, with much fewer demands than in lockdown times when it was birthed, and with fewer volunteers available. We are grateful to all who made it such a success while it was running.

We launched a new prayer space in the back of Mulbarton church, open to all every day, which has been much used and appreciated. We also planted the memorial tree, and recently completed the new path leading to it, so parishioners have somewhere to come when facing neonatal and antenatal bereavement. Other progress was made on various ongoing church building and churchyard projects, with more work planned in the near future to keep all our facilities across the benefice up to scratch.

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A summer holiday club and Christmas holiday club were well received, as we continued to develop our work to help support families, youth and children with their spiritual lives. We also enjoyed several visits to and from classes at the local Primary School, and had a well-received presence at the "Mind, Body, Spirit" fayres at the Village Hall.

There were interesting developments in the wider church, both nationally and regionally, in terms of how we are structured and grouped together, as well as issues in safeguarding, sexuality, gender and identity. We are now part of Depwade Deanery, Humbleyard Deanery having been disbanded altogether. Finances continue to be challenging.

Compared to 2022, there were much fewer weddings in 2023, much more funerals and burials, with baptisms steady:

- We had **7 baptisms & 1 thanksgivings** (7 baptisms in 2022)
- We buried **15 sets of ashes** (8 in 2022)
- We conducted **11 full burials** (8 in 2022)
- We conducted **7 funeral services at crematoriums** (12 in 2022)
- We conducted **14 funeral services in churches** (9 in 2022)
- We conducted **3 wedding ceremonies** (9 in 2022)

On a personal note, I am grateful for the support and understanding shown by the congregations as I have been working out how to do ministry in new ways, and inhabit my role here positively and authentically, as I continue to process past experiences and their ongoing impact. On a personal level, especially with some of the wider goings-on in the church, the recovery journey has been challenging at times.

It is likely tomorrow's villages will have less clergy time than today's; but whatever happens with the future of the church as an institution, or the deployment of clergy locally, I am committed to using the opportunities I have available to me now to do as much good as I can for the communities I serve, while I am able. The values of truth, justice and peace continue to guide. However falteringly, I aspire to live out those values more fully each day, following Jesus' example and teaching, and sharing the journey.