



Saffron Walden & Villages Team Ministry  
Saffron Walden Deanery  
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## **Rector's Report, May 2022**

The year 2021 did not go according to plan. It was, like 2020, a year in which buying a diary may not have been a wise expenditure. However, it was, for me, the year in which I upped sticks from Devon and relocated to Essex. It was the year in which the Church began a slow journey out of Covid and we began to see the changed landscape it left behind. It was the year in which I began to get to know a rich and varied group of people and began to work with them and for them. It was the year in which I was the recipient of much love and grace, and for that I thank you. Thank you for bearing with me as I find my feet, get to know you and your ways, and develop my ministry here.

My thanks especially to Gill and Denis; for your faithful service, for your wise guidance. This year Denis steps down as Churchwarden. On behalf of all of us: Thank you. My thanks also to the many people who make St Mary's, St James' and St John's happen. I am not going to try and list every name because I know I will make some serious omission. Church is firstly a community of people, and we have some truly committed and generous people here. Together they enable us to offer a good variety of worship through which to give praise to God and opportunities for people to worship. There is rich music, a true gem in our crown, along with all who support music making. Strong administration enables to run the church with confidence and as good stewards of plant and finance. And, maybe most importantly, there are projects and people living out their faith in the wider community in many creative ways; through understanding of and care for the environment, to helping people towards meaningful employment and dignity, and much more besides.

Our emergence from Covid has been slow and careful. Getting the right pace and doing it right was never going to be possible in the minds of everyone, but I feel we have done what we can when we could and am pleased that for now most restrictions are lifted. However, we have learned from this experience about the responsibility we each bear for one another, and how each is an indispensable part of the body of Christ. We have seen the limited return of concerts in church, which was lovely, although my abiding memory of the first was a truly Biblical deluge that sought out every loose joint in the roof. We have also repaired the Chancel roof. I cannot tell you how much relief it brings to a Rector to know that the building is well managed and kept in good repair, as far as resources allow. Last Easter we celebrated resurrection, but maybe felt a little like those disciples who still hid behind locked doors even after they had met the risen Christ. At Christmas we began to emerge, although our celebrations were still somewhat muted. It is only since then, and therefore outside of the scope of this report, that things have assumed a more "normal" feel.

Of course, I have little idea what normal means around here. You do. What I can be confident of is that normal is an ever-changing landscape. It is not just Covid that has changed things: Although nationally between a quarter and a third of church goers have



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stopped going, for a whole variety of reasons, and the finances of even the most comfortable Diocese have received a hammer blow which will change the way we are resourced and work together. Attendance at St Mary's has not recovered to anything like the levels we knew pre-Covid, and this is reflected in the lists of volunteers for various rota's and also in our finances. We have fewer volunteers and far fewer clergy to make what we might like to happen, happen. This is not the Rector badgering you to do more and to give more. It may be right for you to do less and give less. I don't know. But it is your Rector urging you to recognise that Christians are firstly a pilgrim people. Our journey of faith is just that, and on any journey the landscape changes.

Many years ago I worked with a professor of ecology in Israel. We wanted to study a particular ecosystem near the border and travelled through miles of a dusty, sandy coloured landscape. We walked through the heat and the dust until we were the same colour as the ground around us. And then we saw it: In a narrow valley, a stream of ice-cold water gently flowing, and around it lush green vegetation. The professor told me this was thought by some to be the valley where King David hid when he wrote the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. *"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake."* The reality is that the same shepherd who led his flock to such a delightful place will also lead them on from there. The lush pastures are not a final destination, but a resting place on a longer journey.

Where will I lead you? It will not be back to where you were before Covid. That is not possible, neither do I believe it is what God calls us to. I commit to upholding the rich tradition of worship and music that we are known for. To that end I will review the liturgies we use and the rotas we work to so that there can be space to traditions both old and new. With fewer clergy available we may need to cancel some services or activities, but we should also look at what new opportunities there may be, creating spaces where people may encounter God in diverse ways and encouraging people to find their calling in contributing to and leading worship. As one who believes that all Christians have a vocation, I wish to offer encouragement, opportunity, and training to each person as they discover and grow into theirs. This means discovering and understanding this Christian faith for ourselves. And I look to create opportunities to do so and would encourage anyone to look at joining study and discussion groups as a means towards this. Likewise, I look for ways that we as Church can respond to the needs of our world. These needs are continually changing, but I am mindful that right now mental health is an area where great support is needed. The purpose of our buildings is to enable all this. Therefore, we need to consider where our buildings present and open or shut door to the growth of faith, and adapt accordingly.

Two more things: I have other commitments; as Team Rector, as Area Dean, and in other aspects of Diocesan life. Plus, I am also part of a Team. Of both, I am grateful. They enrich and enhance what I am able to offer you. For our Churches to grow healthily we will need to function more as a Team offering mutual support and ministry so that all may flourish.



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Whatever you make of my words here please know that I am working for you and for our churches, here in Saffron Walden, across the Team, and across the Deanery. Please continue to be kind and gracious to me. Please continue to tell me what you think, fear and hope for. Please pray for me and with me, that together we may do the work of God in this place.

Yours faithfully

Jeremy

...any questions?