

It seems only yesterday that I was writing my report for last year – how time flies!

We have had a good year as a benefice and I feel that, although we may not be substantially 'Growing in Number' or 'Growing Younger', we are growing together as a benefice and as a community of faith.

Firstly, we had one big thankyou to say. Deirdre, after years of faithful service as a priest, decided that she would not renew her licence to officiate. On Mothering Sunday she officiated at her last service and we gave thanks for the support, wisdom and care that she has given this benefice, especially during the interregnum. Thankfully she will still be a worshipping member of our churches, and her sense of humour and perspective will help to keep me grounded!

As Deirdre stood down so we have Rev'd Alan Perry, who moved to Hacheston, and was granted permission to officiate in our benefice in April. He will be a great addition to ministry in the benefice.

We had more 'thankyous' to say on 4th May at a lovely service when Archdeacon Rich re-commissioned our Elders and commissioned John Adams as a new Elder. I remain so grateful for the faithfulness and dedication of our benefice Elders, without whom I could not fulfil my ministry.

On 6th July Archdeacon Rich returned to licence me as Rector of the benefice. Although the title does not change much, we are now more secure as a benefice and no changes can be made without our approval.

We had a busy Holy Week and Easter which brought a good number of new people through our doors. We had a Palm Sunday service split between the village hall and church at Hacheston and introduced a Taize service at Easton and a sunrise service at Brandeston on Easter Sunday followed by breakfast in the village hall.

One of the biggest joys of this year was the attendance at our Easter Eucharist at Parham when over one hundred people came to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. It was a real blessing, and a reminder to me to print off extra service sheets for next year!

We also had great attendances at all our Christmas services and our churches looked wonderful. Many, many thanks to all who clean and decorate our churches, not just for Christmas but throughout the year.

We had three successful courses in the benefice. Firstly, in January and February we held a course entitled, 'This Christian Life', where we looked at what it means to live out our faith in everyday life. At our Lent course we read John's Gospel and for Advent we had three sessions on the art of Advent looking at some remarkable paintings.

Another highlight of this year was the confirmation of three members of the congregation at Parham. After some memorable confirmation classes, we joined up with St Andrew's Melton for a very moving service led by Bishop Graeme on 14th December, followed by lunch at Hacheston Village Hall.

Holiday club ran again at Brandeston Village Hall and we had great fun with twenty children enjoying crafts, cooking and games. Our theme was 'Navigators' and we heard stories about Jonah, Moses and St Brendan. The children decorated and equipped three magnificent boats! Thanks must go to Mary Baker, Jackie Clark and Kelly Jeffery who always work so hard to make holiday club work so well.

Our benefice Big Breakfast has continued throughout the year, with a break in July and August, and attendance has been growing steadily. It is quite a big undertaking each month, but we have a wonderful group of volunteer helpers and those who come along for the breakfast are truly appreciative of the quality of what we provide.

We have had two joint PCC meetings this year and I hope that we will continue this practice as we grow together as a benefice and acknowledge that we are all part of the same community of faith.

We had joyous weddings at Parham and Easton, and a lovely baptism at Kettleburgh during a benefice service. We have already taken several bookings for weddings in the benefice for next year and beyond.

I believe that we end the year in a good place. We face a number of challenges, and I pray that our new Bishop, Joanne, will prove to be someone who acknowledges and appreciates both the struggles and the joys of rural parishes. Meanwhile let us resolve to keep growing as a community of faithful followers of our Lord Jesus Christ and bringers of his good news to all those who we serve.

Most of all, I am grateful to all who give so much of their time and effort in our churches so that they may remain places of spiritual nourishment to many.

Ann