

Curate's Reflection

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” — 1 Corinthians 12:12

It is a real privilege to offer a short reflection on the year we have just lived through together. This has been a year of change, but it has also been a year in which the faithfulness of many people has kept Shirley Parish steady and hopeful, and where there has been growth in many forms.

And so first, I want to pay tribute to Paul and Kate Day. They helped build a strong foundation of worship, mission, care, governance, and community life, and because of their faithful leadership, when vacancy came, we did not fall apart. In fact, not only have we been able to keep everything going — which is no small achievement — but thanks to the leadership teams and culture that had been built, we have actually seen growth in people coming in, in people growing in faith, as well as in our missional work: in schools, in care homes, and in the life events of baptism, funerals, and weddings.

It is right though, that amongst the growth we acknowledge the closure of Christ the King as a place of worship last August and give thanks for all that was done there and through there.

The reports you have read show some of the visible signs of life and growth - and also the generous giving that made the Pod and the heating project possible. Those things matter. But there is another story that the reports can never fully illustrate - the story of the unseen, steady work that keeps this parish alive.

Think of our parish not as an organisation but as a living body. In that body there are parts — people — who contribute in so many ways, most of which are unknown outside those most immediately affected. Their names may not be in the reports, but

their faithfulness is the reason everything else can happen. We owe them our gratitude just as much as the obvious people. Thank you.

So where are we now, as we gather today? We are a parish that has come through a year of change with faithfulness and grace. We are a community that has discovered, perhaps more deeply than before, how many gifts God has placed among us. We are a body in which people have stepped forward quietly, generously, and often sacrificially, to ensure that worship, pastoral care, and our presence in the wider community have continued without interruption.

We are also a parish that has learned something important about itself: that our life together does not depend on any one person, but on the shared work of many, and on the Spirit who holds us together. The truth is that God has been forming us in many ways and teaching us to trust him in the in-between times.

And we are a parish waiting in hope. The appointment process for a new incumbent is underway, and we hold that in prayer. But even as we wait, we can recognise that God has already been at work among us. The gifts we have seen emerging, the generosity we have witnessed, and the unity we have experienced are themselves signs of God's faithfulness in this season.

We are stewards and custodians of the churches in this parish and servants to all who live here, whatever they believe or don't believe. Jesus has given us the responsibility and the gifts to do this — namely the Holy Spirit and each other. We are a gift to one another.

So if we acknowledge that, and continue to show the courage we have already shown in saying 'yes' to one another and to God, then Shirley will continue to be a place where people know Christ and are helped to make him known.

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Rev'd Richard Haynes APCM 10 May 2026