



## SANCTUARY in the Parish of Calmore & Eling

### Introduction

The transition of the churches of St Mary the Virgin, Eling and St Anne, Calmore from the Parish of Totton to the Parish of Calmore and Eling is an opportunity for refocussing both rule and mission in the benefice. We are presently in a vacancy, restricted in our capacity to communicate by the Covid pandemic, yet unfettered in our ability to pray, to think and to write.

By Advent 2020 our two churches had been set back on their heels. The Totton Parish had lost all but one of its clergy, St Anne's has no church warden and a depleted DCC, St Mary's ambitious Ecochurch project has come to a halt due to the difficulties of raising funds in a time of lockdowns, skeleton services and activities.

The transition to the new parish is in train for April 2021 and will be followed in due course by recruitment to fill the vacancy. These are our waymarkers, but what is our destination?

Advent 2020 saw us praying, thinking and zooming as we began to develop a view of the way ahead. The new year of 2021, as well as giving us hope of the beginning of the end of the pandemic, has also given us new energy and understanding. God knows what He wants us to do; we now have to see it, understand it, and realise it.

Both Churches, as part of the Parish of Totton had been operating under the **pMAP**, *20/20 vision map for a Network Church for Totton Team*. However, there was, by 2019, a growing divergence between the aims and emphases of the four churches in the Totton Parish. At St Mary's there was, from 2018, a strong movement towards EcoChurch and engagement with the world climate, pollution and extinction crisis; St Anne's hitherto exemplary engagement with community and schools was becoming less viable due to the ill health of the Vicar and the aging congregation feeling unable to sustain much more than core activities. When the reorganisation of the parish was announced it was clear that a rethink was needed.

At St Mary's the Eco church movement had been developed by the churchwardens, Rector and DCC into the Sanctuary concept, as described in summary below.

Our considerations over Advent, Christmas and into this New Year have encouraged us to develop and strengthen the Sanctuary concept and embed it in the culture and practice of the new parish. This is not an imposed strategy but an expression of our faith - in our times, facing today's issues and rooted here in our parish and community, among our people.

## Making Sanctuary

### How?

First we realise who, where and what we are. We are building on strong foundations: the 2000 year old Christian Church present to us in the Diocese of Winchester and its Parish of Calmore and Eling. The Parish of Totton of which St Mary's and St Anne's were a part, is being reorganised; the people, buildings and community remain so we don't have to reinvent everything or start from scratch. A pruned tree will grow vigorously and fruitfully.

Our opportunity is not just to cut away the deadwood, the habits of thought and deed that are not needed or not well suited to the times, but to encourage new growth, so that the tree is fruitful and gives pleasure. We want a fine tree a tribute to the glory of God, visible to all who pass by so that they will want to sit in its shade, eat its fruit and hear its birds and insects.

As members of the parish, we need a knowledge of our mission and purpose that we can use to guide our leadership and foster companionship within our community. Sanctuary is a concept that has been developed to underpin the Eco Church project at St Mary's over the last two years. It will now be brought to St Anne's and be the unifying culture of the new parish.

We now look at Sanctuary as it was conceived for St Mary's and modify it to incorporate the strengths of St Anne's and mitigate the weaknesses in both churches.

## The Sanctuary concept at St Mary's 2018 to 2020

What follows is an evolution of Sanctuary from its original concept.

### *Eco Church*

*We at St Mary's aspire to be a **Gold Standard Eco Church** – Eco Church is run by the charitable foundation A Rocha UK.*

*Our aim is to provide solar /air source heating and lighting, accessible indoor toilets, up to date audio visual systems and more. St Mary's will become a church and community building in which the people of Totton and Eling can flourish.*

*We do not live in isolation but with the world of air, sun, rain, plants, and wildlife. Our church grounds will come alive with flowers, insects, animals, and birds. We want you to help us look after them and enjoy their company.*

*We move forward in worship and learning, in making our buildings and church lands sustainable and in harmony with nature, in bringing wellbeing and engagement to our communities, both locally and globally, and being responsible, positive people in our lifestyles and choices.*

### *St Mary's Circles*

*St Mary's will be church for worship, communal activity and contemplation, a sanctuary for spiritual and physical healing and renewal.*

- *Where we connect*
- *Where we create community through being creative through music and the arts*
- *Where an inter-generational space allows young and old to mingle and learn*
- *Where the stranger is a friend you have not yet met*

*We want children, young people, and adults to come to this church as a place of safety and wellbeing, a place of learning, a place of solitude and a place of communal joy.*

*We are open to ideas - your ideas, your love, your wisdom, your sadness, your delights.*

### *Foundation*

- *There may be someone in your family who was married in this church, someone who was buried in the church grounds or had their funeral here. Thousands of children have been baptised here in the ten centuries since this church was founded.*
- *This is continuation, our link with the past and our hope for the future. It happens now, in the present, though our participation.*
- *What we do is important and it makes a difference.*

*From Saxon foundation stones to heat and light from the sun and air this church is ever changing yet is constant to God's purposes.*

# SANCTUARY

## The Sanctuary concept at St Anne's & St Mary's 2021

Sanctuary is **place** + Sanctuary is **people** + Sanctuary is **peace**

The **place** is the Parish of Calmore and Eling, the church buildings and grounds of St Anne's, Calmore and St Mary the Virgin, Eling.

Page | 3

The **place** is where God is to be found.

**Sanctuary is there.**

The **people** are the Christian communities of St Mary's and St Anne's, the neighbour communities of Eling and Calmore, and all who are present in this place, now, in the past and in the future. Mothers and fathers and children; the young, the old and all ages between; those passing by and those staying awhile; the happy and the sad; the strong and the weak; the common and the rare; the poor and the rich; the seekers and the finders; all who are human, who are born, who live a while and who die.

The incarnate Christ is there, alongside and amongst.

**Sanctuary is for them.**

**Peace** is given to the people in this place. It may be in their minds, stilled from anxiety and activity; it may be in their hearts comforted from pains and griefs; it may be in acts of love and care, given and taken.

The Holy Spirit resides in place and in people

**Sanctuary is home**

Sanctuary is the Kingdom of Heaven, given by grace, here and now, as it always has been and will be evermore. It is commonplace and miraculous. All we have to do is notice, to open eyes, to recognise, to be surprised.



## Practice and principles

### CORE

*Christian faith, meditation, worship, praise and prayer.*

#### **John 4.7**

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

#### **Psalms 46 10**

Be still and know that I am God.

### FOUNDATION

*– historic and cultural heritage; traditional Christian values; celebration and consecration of births and marriages, the solaces and solemnities of funerals; the liturgical year; celebrations and festivals; praise and contemplation.*

Both St Mary's and St Anne's are suffused with history: the latter from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century church school movement, the former with a foundation in the early Christian era of Saxon and Norman England.

Heritage embeds these churches in our community.

Human history is evident in the births recorded and blessed, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and burials that have taken place over centuries and still take place. Key moments in individual, family and civic life take place in our churches and remain in memory and memorial.

This is the foundation on which we build and the heritage that we conserve.

Great service is given by our congregations, unsung and too often unacknowledged. Nevertheless, our welcome to both the grieving and the joyful is freely given.

Both St Anne's and St Mary's are important places of weekly Sunday worship for their congregations. It is these congregations who run the church, by taking on responsibilities - cleaning, flower arranging, setting up for services, fundraising, singing in the choir, providing refreshments, serving on church councils and more. Without them, the church would be an empty shell. With them, it is a place of continuous worship.

It is this core congregation for whom the rituals of the church, the eucharist, litany and lectionary, holydays and seasons resonate most deeply.

Both congregations are presently mostly made up of older people, many now in their 70s, 80s and 90s. People under retirement age are rare, young people and families are infrequently seen at Sunday Worship.

Too often older people are seen as a problem, a cause of the church's decline. On the contrary they are the heartwood of the church and it is our neglect of them that is a contributor to decline. There will always be old people; it is as sure as birth and death.

It is also said that older people are resistant to change and set in their ways. In fact, we *all* are to a greater or lesser extent; we all need the security of habits and constancy and find change unnerving and uncomfortable. However, I suggest that older people need affirmation that what they have and desire is good and will be honoured - as we honour our own parents and grandparents.

***They will accept change around them, not to them.***

Churches are like extended families of several generations. The younger generations have dispersed to other communities, living their own lives, visiting occasionally but rarely living in the same house or even next door. Yet they are still family with connections to the family home. Their needs, drives, aspirations, and yearnings are those of young people making their way in life. What will bring them home are life's setback's and disappointments, the sufferings of life that Jesus died for, and their own realisations that all is not well in the world, or with people they connect with or love, or themselves. They want hope for themselves and their families in a seemingly hopeless world.

Sanctuary aspires to be visible and welcoming and, above all, non-judgmental to these prodigal children. It will offer the fatted calf of love and the ointment of security.

## CIRCLES

*– our caring community of faith; our brothers and sisters in the community; inclusivity and outwardness; our place in the world.*

Here are some experiences of open-doored sanctuary at St Mary's.

- A homeless man occasionally stays for a few nights, or sometimes just overnight, in the porch by the outside toilet. He knows he is secure and won't be moved on. He receives kindness from the church people.
- Two young women came into the church when it was open for prayer during lockdown 2. They asked if it was a Christian church and one of them said that her parents had been married here. They thought it was a beautiful church and wanted to come back for a longer visit.
- A young man was passing as I was closing up after midweek 'open for individual prayer time'. I asked him if he wanted to come in and explained that the church was open weekly at this time and that he was welcome to come in. Next week he did so, sat in masked silence for half an hour, left. He has now been coming every week. We do not speak. I do not want to interrupt his conversation with God.

Here are some indications of welcoming the community:

- Eling Infants School wants to visit St Mary's regularly to engage the children with the history and life of the church. They delight in taking part in Christingle and Easter Bonnet parades.
- Eco Eling, the Eling Hill residents' group is active in the wilding of the churchyard, both planning and execution, and when conditions are right will use the church and churchyard for meetings and fundraising.
- Eling Tide Mill has an arrangement with St Mary's where we will host their visitors to the mill who also want to visit St Mary's.

# SANCTUARY

- St Anne's is used as a community hall for a number of self-running groups – bridge, French conversation, a walking club etc.
- Musicians and choirs love to perform in our churches and we love hosting them.

A common denominator of these relationships is that they are either spontaneous or organised by the community bodies themselves, not by the church, except as a facilitator. We do not have, nor are likely to have people to run the show. What we do have is the willingness to open doors, welcome, host and encourage.

Page | 6

There is a great opportunity for growth in this area, and, importantly, an opportunity for income.

## ECO

*– care for creation; personal and social responsibility; joy in life.*

The environmental crisis, pollution, extinction & climate change, is and will be the dominating concern of the world for the rest of this century. Individuals and small organisations are relatively ineffectual when it comes to making the vast decisions and changes needed to halt or even slow down our lemming rush to the cliff. Yet it is as individuals that we are most affected, though threat of war, famine, plague, and natural disaster. But mostly we are afflicted by unspecific fear, uncertainty, anxiety and despair. We want to do something even though it may be hopeless. We also want to be able to live out the lives we have in a fruitful and stress-free way.

## SPIRIT

*GOD'S LOVE, personal faith, rule of life, pilgrimage, prayer and meditation, CHRIST'S LOVE.*

We express through:

- Our rule of life as a church
- Our personal rule of life
- Music, Art and Poetry
- Celebrations of God's creation indoors and out
- Taizé services
- Silent prayer times
- Welcome to visitors, pilgrims those in need of rest.

Sanctuary is Father, Abba, our security, and strength.

Sanctuary is Incarnate Christ, our humility and frailty.

Sanctuary is Holy Spirit, our breath, and our senses.

## A RULE OF LIFE FOR SANCTUARY

Whilst we may as individuals adhere to a Rule of Life, we shall also have a common rule, a set of principles, that reflect our mission as a parish.

What we are given when we become followers of Christ is meaning – the signified life.

For Peter and Andrew, it was a real act of following in time and place. For us, 2000 years later, we are both in Jesus's life and He in ours. The *following* is a realisation. The accompaniment is the reality of his presence. We can envy the disciples their physical accompaniment of Jesus, though I doubt if any of us would want the awful denouement. Our accompaniment is an act of imagination, synonyms for which are creativity, inspiration, and inventiveness. It doesn't come naturally; our natures, our habits of mind and body are essentially singular and self-centred. A Rule of Life is not only a reminder that you are in company, it is a cloister to walk in daily in company with Jesus.. Without it, you are in the public square, in the market or in the desert where too much or too little human presence distracts and misrepresents.

In practice, the Rule means committing ourselves to the 5 pillars of SANCTUARY – CORE, FOUNDATION, CIRCLES, ECO & SPIRIT. As individuals we may do a lot or little depending on our life circumstances, our abilities, our health and energy and, indeed, our willingness. By committing as a Church we can support, strengthen and encourage each other.

A Sanctuary Rule of Life can be reviewed annually, because priorities and opportunities change. It will in the course of the year be a reminder and prompt. Above all it is a statement of commitment that gives meaning to our church life.

## FINANCE

The existing model of church finance is unsuitable in most ways you can think of for churches such as St Mary's and St Anne's, relying as it does on a mixture of charitable giving by the congregation and amateur community fundraising. Ambitious schemes like the St Mary's building project are very difficult to finance. The new parish will start life undercapitalised and with inadequate income streams. It will struggle on but be severely hampered by poverty, which in this case is not a virtue.

**The priority in the next 3 months is to design a new model of finance that will be fit for the coming decade.**

### SANCTUARY in summary

- Practically, we will be Eco Churches, organisations that have care for creation at the heart of everything we do.
- Communally we will lead, educate, and engage in the green world.
- Individually, we will encourage and be encouraged into ways of life that are environmentally good and positive.
- Spiritually, we will open ourselves to God's mercy and grace.
- Physically, we will use our church and lands therapeutically for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of our communities.
- Theologically, we are Anglicans, with the Holy Trinity on our T shirts.

## Congregation.

*January 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021*

- Continue to integrate the congregations of St Anne's and St Mary's through newsletters, zoom meetings and joint services and events (subject to Covid rules).

*17<sup>th</sup> February, Ash Wednesday to 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021.*

- 4 Lent meditation and learning sessions for both churches together at St Anne's (COVID-19 permitting) Zoom and video alternatives will be provided.

*Easter Sunday*

- Calmore and Eling Parish inauguration celebration.

## Acknowledgements

Sanctuary has been given to me to write because I am a writer and thinker in the right place at the right time. But I have not devised this alone; it is the product of many conversations, with friends and mentors, lay and clergy alike. The congregations of St Mary's over the last six years have been solid and supportive. The Revd. Linda Robertson has walked with me on the South Downs giving me counsel and guidance. The Revd. Chris Steed has mentored me, argued with me and inspired me – Sanctuary is as much his as mine. Above all, it is a gift from God, handed to us to do His works.

*Graham Norman 2021*