

The Parish of Leake with Over and Nether Silton and Kepwick APCM
Report 2018
(In place of the Sermon on Sunday 18th March 2018)

This is my last Report to the Annual Parochial Church Meetings of the parish of Leake with Over and Nether Silton and Kepwick and I'm finding it hard to believe that Mel and I have been here for almost ten years.

Our God is a God of energy and movement. So for us nothing can stand still for long as God invites us to respond and to continue our journey in faith. At the moment the pace of change in our society and in our church is rapid. It is sometimes a struggle to come to terms with the world around us. Yet we continue to explore new ways of engaging with local communities and reaching those who may not have much contact with the church or the teaching of Jesus.

Casting around for a text for this morning I was given "Keeping on keeping on". When I explored it (on Google of course) I discovered (again) that it is not the work of a Biblical writer at all, but from the pen of that great Yorkshire saint, Alan Bennett. It's the title of the third volume of his diaries, published in 2016, which sits on my bookshelf alongside the other two.

But "Keeping on keeping on" is pretty good text for us this morning. Especially if it doesn't just mean "keep on doing the same old things". I think that's mostly what Alan Bennett **does** mean, although of course his ideas and his work contradict this, showing a remarkable ability to keep pace with the changing times. It is precisely that contrast between his 1940s schoolboy persona and his insights into life today that make him a national treasure.

Not, of course, that there's anything wrong with "keeping on doing the same old things" when they are appropriate to the needs of the present. That, after all, is what we mean by tradition and continuity and faithfulness. How well do we know that "new" doesn't automatically mean better (or easier or cheaper either).

But the "keeping on" that I'm talking about is something a bit more dynamic than that. It's that cycle of DO → LOOK → THINK → CHANGE that I've been banging on about for the last ten years. That continuous process of looking at what we're doing and then either affirming it or adapting it to changing needs, changing times.

It's there over and over again in our various annual reports this year:

Improvements, adaptations to our buildings to make them more usable by church and community.

Being flexible in our patterns of worship and, here at Leake, embracing a new way of accompanying our singing so that we can continue to have music at our services. As Cafe Church has developed it has been well received and provides a new way for people to gather and to worship God together.

Leake and Over Silton have both developed Friends organisations and websites which are drawing more people into our networks and encourage them to support our services and events and also to offer support for our buildings.

Increasing involvement with other parishes in the benefice in terms of resources for working in our school and building critical mass for work with children and families.

Our school is a great local encouragement for the benefits of adapting to changing circumstances. During my time here it has doubled in size and in 2017 achieved two judgements of "Outstanding", first from the church based SIAMS inspection and then from Ofsted. You can't do better than that! It is regarded as a beacon of excellence in North Yorkshire and just in the last few weeks it has left local authority control to become an academy within the Elevate Multi Academy Trust. This is a larger grouping of primary and secondary, church and community schools. The Church of England is well represented at Trustee level and the other member schools were anxious to have Knayton as part of the Trust because they want access to the distinctiveness of the school which derives from its Christian ethos.

This permeates the whole of school life and curriculum, delivered seamlessly by all the staff but assisted by activities like the regular "Open the Boom", regular visits from the two Foundation Governors and two visits a year to church at Christmas and Easter. So we have developed a different relationship with the school now, but one that remains effective and successful and it continues to be an important part of our engagement and mission in the community. However the intake is now widely spread stretching from Osmotherley to Thirsk and even Helmsley and the majority of the pupils now come from outside the traditional Hillside catchment. That image of the "village school" has been consigned to history – but we have been able to keep on responding to the change.

Hillside Parish Magazine is keeping on as a regular source of contact and information. It hasn't done anything very different this year but continues to turn a healthy profit.. Please do continue to look for opportunities to increase

the circulation and to enhance the content with articles, reviews and community information. Thanks to Lizz Hepple and Isabel Dalton for all their support.

Following Trevor and Margaret's departure in February 2017, after 6 ½ years we were delighted to welcome Bill and Anne to the benefice in June. We were indeed fortunate to secure a replacement so quickly, they have "hit the ground running" and Bill has quickly become a much valued colleague with a distinctive ministry among us.

More widely the deanery, the diocese and the national Church of England continue to keep on engaging and reflecting in our changing world. Seeking to continue to proclaim the Good News of the gospel in ways that are accessible and to retain a Christian presence of mission and ministry in every community.

Thank you again to the Churchwardens, PCC members and all who continue to make the mission and ministry of the church an important part of village and community life.

As I move towards retirement I am confident that life and mission in our churches will continue to keep on keeping on, maintaining the heart of the Christian tradition here and continuing to respond and adapt to local needs and circumstances.