

Bodiam Parish Assembly – St Giles’ Churchwardens’ Report 2023-2024

This year has been something of a game of two halves at St Giles’ Church. We have continued to have two services each month; Parish Communion on the third Sunday of the month which attracts around 12 worshippers and the much less formal Family Service, on the first Sunday, which is attended by an average of about 16. Both services start at 11.15am and at the end of the Family Service, there is the opportunity for fellowship and a chat over refreshments. Overall there are 47 people on the St Giles’ church electoral roll. Then during last summer, Canon Christopher announced to the PCC that he planned to retire at the end of October. A farewell party was held in The Hub, by kind permission of Nick and Anna Eastwood. There was a wonderful turnout which was testament to Christopher’s popularity within the parish and beyond. We have all missed his warmth, humour and inspiring ministry from which we benefitted so greatly for the seven years he dedicated to Bodiam.

Since Christopher’s departure, we have been blessed with a corps of retired clergy who have been taking the services during this interregnum. The Rev. David Page takes the Family Services and The Rev. Christopher Breeds, the Parish Communion service. Christopher Breeds has a particularly strong connection to St Giles’ as he sang in the choir as a boy and his father played the organ and was also headmaster of the primary school. We have also had visits from the retired Bishop of Edmonton, Peter Wheatley, the Archdeacon of Hastings, Edward Dowler and this coming Sunday, the Bishop of Lewes, Will Hazlewood. This support is very much valued by the PCC, the congregation and not least, the Churchwardens as we continue in the process of finding a new priest. Despite the interregnum, attendance at the major festivals continues to be strong. Last year we had 59 on Easter Sunday and 90 on Christmas Day. Email reminders of services are regularly sent to parishioners who have requested them and have proved a useful reminder. Do please let me or Graham know if you'd like to go on the St Giles’ emailing list.

Bodiam CE Primary School holds Harvest Festival, Easter and Christmas services and also occasional concert style services in the church.

A couple of particular highlights of the last year were the Carols by Candlelight Service; attended by around 75 and the Pub Quiz. For the first time in almost living memory St Giles’ had its own choir performing two short anthems during the Carol Service thanks to the dedication, skill and enthusiasm of Arran Keith, our occasional organist. These together with the traditional bible readings, various secular texts and poems made for a very moving start to the Christmas season. The annual Pub Quiz at the Castle Inn was a sell-out and attracted competitors from across the parish and beyond for an evening of fun and fellowship.

While it is encouraging to see the wide participation in these special events and services, it remains still, a constant challenge to maintain and increase numbers at the regular services.

We are very grateful for the financial support we receive from our parishioners particularly those who are not regular worshippers but who do appreciate that the church is very much a parish church and in many ways the centre of the village. It is still the place of choice for many to get married, christened and buried. We are very aware too that the churchyard in particular, is a place of special importance to both current and previous parishioners. In light of the importance of St Giles' within the village, please don't rely on just the congregation to keep St Giles' alive and available for the whole village and the school.