



Priest-in-Charge Report for the Annual Meetings

Reflections on the life of Severn Loop in 2025

Some key statistics for the year:

- Around 255 Sunday Services. Often with one each week taken either by the worship teams at Montford, Shrawardine and Bicton, or by Pat Hall.
- 50 Sunday Zoom services- each week at 6pm.
- A growing staff team! Rosie Dixon joined us in January 2025 as our Administrator, and Dave Latcham joined us in July 2025, as our curate.
- 5 Forest Churches- Thank you to those who hosted them- at Leaton Forest, Shrawardine, Bicton, Battlefield and Bomere Heath.
- 12 monthly communions at Isle Court Nursing Home.
- Around 200 home communion services and home/ hospital visits- the vast majority done by Joyce- with those who cannot get to church.
- Around nine services in church held for our local schools, and about 40 'Open the Book' worship assemblies across Bicton and Bomere Heath schools.
- About 34 regular monthly social events at Bicton, Bomere Heath and Shrawardine (coffee mornings and Stepping Out Café).
- Weekly Coffee and Play in the Mission Church.
- Our new youth group- Loop Life- began in May and meets fortnightly.
- Our new children's group- Loop Explorers- began in October and meets fortnightly.
- A new small group which meets for Bible study and prayer- fortnightly on Wednesdays.
- Leaton has become the venue for the local monthly REVS meeting.
- 8 services on Easter Day- including a sunrise service at Battlefield.
- 9 carol services and 10 Christmas services.
- 7 weddings.
- 10 baptisms (four of which were in their own names- so not babies).
- 4 confirmations
- 37 Funerals and/or burials of ashes.
- 247 people on our monthly email list.
- Our *Festival of Hope*- an interactive pilgrimage around eight of the churches in our patch, with Stations of the Resurrection at each one.
- Termly Loop 'Prayer and Praise' evenings.
- Various fundraisers and/or special events around the parishes.

'Their eyes were opened, and they recognised him'

The story of the road to Emmaus (at the end of this document), which we usually hear a couple of weeks after Easter, immediately puts us in mind of travelling, and a pilgrim's purpose- for Jesus to be revealed in our life's journey. Different people may join us along the road, and their company, their wisdom, their insights can be such a blessing as to be transforming. Sometimes, like the travellers, a companion can be a complete surprise or can enrich our lives in ways that we weren't expecting. Our hope and our prayer is that we are always heading towards that table- which was journey's end for these weary travellers, where, in the breaking of the bread, we see that Christ is amongst us and had been with us all along.

At this time of year, we hold our annual meetings and think back over the calendar year 2025, and ask that question- where did we see signs of the glorious mystery of God giving us hope and peace amidst a difficult world and a community context that can sometimes feel fragile?

Well, the year began with some new companions. Rosie, who is our administrator, joined in January 2025, and her presence has enabled us to do so much more- not only to free up ministers' time (Joyce, Peter, Dave and I), but also to start things we hadn't been able to start- our termly *Schools Experience* at Bicton is a really good example- it's something we already run at Ruyton for Bomere, but I'd longed for it to be possible at Bicton too- and now it is. Her role has also meant that we can be a bit smarter and smoother about our public face- our purpose isn't to *advertise* ourselves (we're not in the marketplace, despite that sometimes being a societal assumption); we are here for the people who live here- that's what a parish church is- and we just want to be better at making sure people know that, and feel welcome.

We also began hosting REVS at Leaton at the start of 2025, and that has been nothing but a joy and delight. We're very grateful to Charles and the team at Leaton forest for accommodating us when we run out of room in the carpark, and our carol service at Christmas, with the barrel organ that Peter Leddington and the crem team brought, was just ace. The main thing though, is that it is open companionship in which the Holy Spirit is at work- and it's such a privilege to provide that safe space.



You may also recall our *Festival of Hope*? In the Easter season, we created a pilgrimage round our churches, and each church community had a display about one of the resurrection stories. It felt like four extra members of the congregation at Montford, with their incredible, life-sized depiction of the ascension! The road to Emmaus was beautifully presented at Shrawardine, the porch at Bicton had an

interactive cupboard to explore the Upper Room and prayers of hope, written by the children at the school, covering the space- so moving. At Leaton we had the miraculous catch of fish, brightly and brilliantly set-up, at Albrighton- sheep (what else?!)- as we thought about the Good Shepherd, and there was a wonderful picture of David Jagger's childhood Bible. At Battlefield it was the empty tomb- a tent- with the smells of



the Easter garden and a prayer frieze. At Fitz we thought about the Great Commission and had a map for people to mark-up special places, and at Preston Gubbals we explored the birth of the church at Pentecost. Our three events were also real highlights- our mini *Forest Church* pilgrimage from Shrawardine to Montford, our concert at Leaton and *Songs of Praise* at Bicton- which included local VE Day memories.



All of this is, in some ways, a microcosm for the spiritual care of our communities- what we *know* is so small- some people told me about going round the church displays (and they had definitely been played with!). Of course we see people at services, but there is a whole mountain that we never get to know. Ways in which the Holy Spirit uses our offerings to speak life and love and hope to others- and the ways in which the *Festival of Hope* has blessed strangers is something that will keep unfolding, but that ultimately, we just trust to God.

That trust, prayer and the openness to leaning into the surprises God throws onto our path is the way of discipleship. When I think of just the past week- the people I've seen, the homes I've been into, the places I've chatted in, those who have sat in my study- I'm awestruck by the depths of each experience, each journey, and by the need to pray for one another and encourage each other in the challenges and the joys.

And we keep on keeping on- it is the vocation of the local church- we are here, and we prayerfully reflect on the ways in which we are here. Our churchyards continue to be such important places of peace and remembering. The occasional offices really matter- funerals, weddings,





baptisms. Last year we did lots- we said farewell to dear folk in some of our congregations, and that's the cost of being in fellowship for going-on nine years now- increasingly it's my honour to lead funerals for friends. With weddings we had a surprising flurry at Shrawardine, with three in October and early November- stunning and such a joy. And baptisms... well, four people were baptised in their own name last year- which means they were old enough to have chosen it themselves- I've even had to buy a paddling pool! That, coupled with confirmations and the beginnings of our youth group (Loop Life) and children's group (Loop Explorers)- which

both started in response to requests from the community- show us that faith is alive in younger generations, and God asks us to join in the work of nurturing that.

We had another first- a Pet Memorial Service in Albrighton- it met such a deep need, and provided a space for grief where many struggle to find it. We will do it again this year. One thing we noticed was how important it was for children, so we will look at how we can extend a thoughtful invitation in our local schools. Over in Battlefield we continue to work with the prayer community, and last year, after at least a decade of discussions, the *Veolia* community money paid for the lychgate to be restored. At the opening ceremony, those who had been married there walked under it first- a



lady whose wedding was over sixty years ago, followed by a couple who I think were married there nearly fifty years ago. It was profoundly moving.



That theme of looking *back* in order to see the continued, unfolding presence of God *now*, is a growing theme for us- it's a growing theme in our world too. Last year, spontaneously, all my wedding

couples asked for a prayer to remember loved-ones lost. If mission is increasingly drawing on heritage- and God is drawing us into life by saying 'remember this' or 'remember when'- then we're on it. We're on it in these wonderful communities where memories are long and buildings house such history. We're on it, so that we can commend the reality of God-with-us today, and step into the future with hope.

There were many other special moments- Dave joining us as a fellow pilgrim at the beginning of July was immense. To have a curate here, in a landscape where any clergy is becoming a rarity, and to have the task of together training him, learning

from him and equipping him for a life in parish ministry, is a wonderful privilege, which we don't take lightly.

Our prayer continues to be, like the travellers on the Road to Emmaus, that our eyes will be opened and we will recognise Christ among us, and join in. Please pray



with gratitude for all that has been, and for all the people that enable it to happen- which is (along with churchwardens, PCC, ministers)- every single one of you and more (I have over 120 thank-you cards to write to everyone who helps out!). And pray for all that will be- already this year we have begun Loopy Sundays, we look forward to Dave being priested, and we are welcoming Bishop Michael to walk the Loop on 9th June. Please pray too for resources of all kinds- one another, a confidence in our gifts and abilities, and the finances to sustain what we do, so that we can join in with the work of God- who is love and life for all who call our wonderful villages, hamlets and farmland home. Thank you, and praise God!

A prayer as we journey onwards...

God our Creator and Redeemer, help us in Severn Loop to grow in holiness, unity and people.

Draw us closer to you and to those around us.

Give us enthusiasm in our faith, and wisdom in sharing it with young and old.

Open our eyes to new opportunities, our lips to sing and speak of you, and our hearts to welcome the stranger.

Grow your kingdom in us and in the world,

through the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.



Luke 24. 13-35: The Road to Emmaus

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.