

Christmas 2005

Dear Friends

Time to think back over the year and see how much we can remember! The most noticeable thing this year, as you will see from the photo is that Hannah and Laura are growing up fast!! **Hannah** was 15 last July, takes her GCSEs this summer and is trying to make choices for the 6th form at the moment - where did the last 5 years go??!! **Laura** is very much a teenager too, soon to make choices about her GCSE subjects and will be 14 in March. **Tilly** the dog is 21 months and still a handful at times! She has swallowed countless socks this year, destroyed Kay's mobile, chewed three TV remote controls, shredded two books, eaten the insoles of several of Alastair's shoes, and a considerable quantity of paperwork! However so far she has left the furniture alone, for which we are grateful... They tell us she will calm down when she reaches the two-year mark - we're looking forward to that! We now enjoy dog training on Mondays and lots of long walks!



Holidays this year have taken a back seat as we have been saving hard for a trip to New Zealand in summer 2006. We have just booked our flights and are very much looking forward to visiting old friends. This summer we much enjoyed a brief visit from Sonny Te Waaka Melbourne - a Maori priest who Alastair had corresponded with when doing his MA. We hope to visit him in Rotorua next year. Our neighbours in Cophthorne recently emigrated to Christchurch on the South Island - and of course we have many friends and family in Auckland and elsewhere. Much to look forward to! So we were grateful to two lots of friends who lent us cottages near Cheltenham in February and in The New Forest in May for holidays this year. During August we had a working holiday at our flat in Edinburgh which was between tenants and needed various painting and DIY jobs doing.

Hannah says: Hey everyone, Merry Christmas! Whoa, this year has gone so quickly. Hmm, lets see, I'll start with music. I have been learning saxophone for 2 years now, and still thoroughly enjoying it, with thoughts of taking my grade 6 in the summer. I play in the music group at Church regularly on either Flute or Saxophone, and took up guitar lessons last January, which has been great. I have joined the school swing band, which is being filmed by the BBC at Gatwick Airport on Monday morning for the news - look for the terrified blonde with the saxophone! I also played in my school summer concert at the Hawth theatre, and will be playing in the Christmas concert next week. I recently came top of my year in my Music GCSE mock, which I was very pleased about. Last summer, I took part of my AS level Philosophy and Ethics exam (which I am doing instead of GCSE Religious Studies) and was pleased to get an A. I also received an English prize at my school Prize giving. School in general is going quite well, but starting to get rather stressful as mocks are over and exams begin to loom, and 6th form just around the corner (finally, no more school uniform!). It was great however to get some time off on work experience in October, when I went to North One Television Studios in London, which required travelling on the trains through London twice a day. This was a great experience, which I think my mum ended up more concerned about than I was! I still love drama, and have enjoyed seeing many productions this year, including *The Woman in Black* and *Bloodbrothers* with my GCSE Drama class, the *Lion King* and *Mary Poppins* with family and just last night, the local Pantomime at the Hawth starring Dave Benson Phillips. I was also a chorus member of our school production this year of 'The Little Shop of Horrors', which was great fun.

On a less fun note, I joined the realms of teens with braces last May, and look forward to getting rid of them next summer! I did my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award last year, and look forward to receiving my certificate as the process comes to a close. I am still debating whether or not to continue on to do Silver, as it is a lot of fun, but very hard work! Speaking of debating, I continue to be a part of my schools Model United Nations debating group, which has taken me away on trips twice and was also hosted at my school last year. Our Church youth group, Yoyo (queue Dad with cheesy name 'You're only young once') is beginning to thrive, and we have had many outings recently, including trips to Thorpe Park, and concerts, such as seeing Matt Redman twice, which has been great. I am hugely looking forward to the much anticipated New Zealand trip next summer, and will be celebrating my 16th over there, which will

be great. Ok, I think that's just about it. Hope everyone has a great Christmas and New Year, and look forward to seeing some of you in 2006!

Laura says: I can't believe it has been a year and it is time for 'the Christmas letter!' I also had braces fitted this year and sang in the Choir at school for 'The Little Shop of Horrors,' which was great fun. I celebrated my 13th birthday in March, with three groups of friends - at Pizza Hut, the cinema & at home. We had a German girl, Maren staying with us at the time & took her to London the next day to Madame Tussauds and to the Lion King. I have continued with riding and Gymnastics, though Gym has been re-organised due to a new Leisure Centre being built and since November, I only train once a week. I have just given up Guides as I still do something most nights after school - but hopefully I will be able to go to Dog training a bit more often now! Tilly passed her Bronze Certificate a few months ago - but she is still too excitable to go up to the advanced class!

Kay continues to teach three days a week at Court Meadow School. Mostly, it is immensely enjoyable, but complex health and other issues with pupils and staff mean it is quite stressful at times. Combined with activities at home and church, there just never seem to be enough hours in the day & often jobs around the house are not completed, which is frustrating. In July 2006, the Head teacher is taking early retirement, so the coming year will bring considerable change - it has really been Jo's inspiration and leadership which formed the school ethos, positive outlook and sense of encouragement for both pupils and staff - so we very much hope for the right appointment!

For a few months last year (March-July), I took up 'running' with a friend who was training for a charity Fun Run. We 'trained' three times a week! It was surprisingly good fun - fresh air, good company and no Gym fees to pay! However, we took a break in July & August & we have only been a few times since then, so not much weight lost yet!!

Highlights of the year apart from family events include several trips to London. We had a fabulous day at the Turner/Whistler/Monet exhibition and took a boat on the Thames from The Tate Modern which was an added bonus! We have also managed a few Theatre trips to celebrate various birthdays: most recently to see 'A Woman in White' with my brother, followed by a meal in Chinatown. Life is so busy that we haven't the energy to entertain & socialise as much as we'd like, but I'm more than ever convinced of the importance of occasionally doing something 'just for fun', so we're trying to make the effort! I continue to help with various groups at Church and am about to help with Sunday Clubs again, looking after a child with cerebral palsy. Much time these days seems to be taken with my role as official chauffeur - and I thought people only joked about teenage taxi services!!

Alastair still has a number of wider church responsibilities, many of which are a gift and inspiration, and few are chores. But even with other Deanery & Diocesan involvement, over 85% of his time is with his primary interest, the parish; still ably supported by assistant priest Paul Smith and a host of others. People continue to come to and grow in faith, even with a high turnover of villagers and a significant number of parishioners moving out of the area. We have a second ordinand from Copthorne completing training for the ministry this coming year, and potentially a couple of others in the wings.

In the parish, plans and preparations for a significant Parish Centre building excite - and horrify - in equal amounts, as the project edges slowly forward. One small step towards it is almost complete: the brilliant Labyrinth Memorial Garden is now *in situ*, and the solid glass centre-piece sculpture by Colin Reid (largely Arts Council funded) is due to be placed in March 2006, which is also St. John's 125th anniversary year. March is also our 10th anniversary in Copthorne, and - astonishingly - marks Alastair's 10th year as vicar here. A pleasant surprise for Alastair was to be elected as one of Chichester Diocese's 6 clergy to the General Synod of the Church of England for the next 5 years - predicted to be a fairly turbulent time for the Anglican Communion. Pray for us!

With love to you all for a happy and peaceful Christmas

Alastair Kay Hannah and Laura