

**A MESSAGE FROM THE VENERABLE NICOLA SULLIVAN,
ARCHDEACON OF WELLS
ASSOCIATION VICE-PRESIDENT**

As I write, we are in the depths of the coldest December for over 100 years. It's been hard enough for clergy and parishioners to get to churches in this deep, frozen snow and I can only imagine that the bell towers across Somerset have not been the most comfortable places to be! It is a tribute to the impressive dedication of the 2000 or so ringers across the diocese that bells will have rung out across towns and villages celebrating Christmas and the New Year, as they have throughout the last year, and brought cheer and comfort to many, even those who do not come to church. It's encouraging to know that bellringing is still attracting new people. I was able to sneak into a practice session in the Cathedral tower earlier this year and it was a joy to meet several teenagers 'learning the ropes', literally. I realised just how much concentration and team work is required, but also saw a mix of people enjoying themselves and passing on their knowledge to those who were just beginning. I wish you well as you recruit and train so that the ancient art of ringing English bells can continue in future generations.

As I travel around to rural parishes on a Sunday I still reckon that finding the church through winding down the window and listening for the direction of bells is more reliable than a sat nav! Bells are an important reminder to the community that God is present, the Church active, and everyone is welcome. I guess in this modern day, we cannot assume that people will necessarily know why bells ring (and perhaps a few think of them as a nuisance!) but never underestimate how significant what you do is for your community. As the Government encourages us to think about the 'Big Society' and how we can all gain so much by offering our voluntary services to the neighbourhood, perhaps more people will find themselves eager to ensure that the parish church has ringers for the Tower.

It is my privilege, on behalf of my colleagues on the Bishop's staff, to thank you for your hard work and commitment; and to wish you a very successful, encouraging and happy 2011. You might enjoy these words I like to read on New Year's Eve:

*Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.
Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go:
Ring out false, ring in the true....
.... Ring out the darkness of the land
Ring in the Christ that is to be.*

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-92) In Memorium A.H.H., 1850

Nicola Sullivan
Archdeacon of Wells