

## **Rector's Report to APCM, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021**

It's only seven months since we held an 'Annual' Parochial Church Meeting and so the scope of this report is accordingly a bit reduced, but our thanks to those who have served in offices in the church over that period is none the less. Most of them, of course, had already been serving in the same offices for some time beforehand, and many will be continuing.!

The last APCM came about 7 months after the beginning of the first lockdown, so as we look back we can see it as marking a half-way point in this long journey we have been taking together through Covid restrictions of various and changing kinds. The seven months before the last APCM were of course shocking and disturbing in the disruption of normal life and the national grief over the great toll of deaths exacted by the disease, and members of the church were grappling with the experience of not being able to worship together during much of that time, and having the church building kept strictly closed; and yet there was a certain positivity afforded by a lovely early summer, the discovery of great community solidarity – expressed in the emergency foodbank housed in our Pavilion – and the corporate clapping on Thursday evenings. The last 7 months have perhaps lost some of that sense of positivity, as we have realised that we are in this for a much longer haul than we had expected (do you remember thinking it would all be over by the autumn?). We have grown a bit weary of all the extra effort we have to make to keep church life and worship going on a variety of platforms, and the long-term impacts on people's welfare and mental health has become more evident.

So I'd like to give a special thanks to everybody for keeping on keeping on – and more than that: for making things go on growing in the face of tiredness and disappointment, for resilience and forward thinking, for doing all the burdensome things that need to be done to go on 'being church' during a pandemic. The churchwardens, of course; all the members of the Ministry Team, and my clergy and LLM colleagues; everyone who has contributed to Zoom services, or taken part in unaccustomed ways in services being relayed from church by Facebook Live; to the musicians, who suffered months of frustration without singing together as a choir, and then worked hard to record hymns 'remotely' for services; also for their acceptance of the impracticability of continuing to do that for the longer term – and of course, to David Parry-Smith for spending so much time thinking about these things and making things happen, and to Anne, who as administrator contributes so much to the worship of the church by marshalling material whether for Zoom, for 'Virtual Worship' on paper, or for worship in church. I'd also like to thank Yannick for taking up the baton of Linton Community Help and making sure the church and its members have such an important continuing involvement with it, and all those who have pitched-in to help. I think that with this, and the work of the Children and Families group, led by Sarah, keeping contacts going, arranging and delivering Boxes of Hope, and preparing and training for the day when we can offer Make Lunch clubs in the school holidays – with all these things, we can truly say that out of this pandemic has come a much greater involvement of St Mary's in the wider community in wholly positive ways, with good long-term potential.

But thank you, too, to all those who have kept on keeping on with the 'normal' behind-the-scenes work which helps the church be church – to the verger, Nanette, those who have gone on cleaning the church and its ornaments, those who have still worked so hard on flower arrangements, even though fewer people would be in the church building to appreciate them. And to those who give time to considering church finance and working in a variety of ways in church administration and welcome; to the Events committee, seemingly indefatigable in coming up with ideas to bring people together and to raise money – even when 'together' means 'online'. To all of

you, thanks, as you live your faith so fully in the present and keep looking to the future in hopeful and determined ways, even when the challenges ahead seem great.

More new things are already growing, which may not yet be well-known to all members of our congregations: those who care for the churchyard are shortly to meet with a representative of the local Wildlife Trust who will tell us how we can manage it even more effectively for wildlife, engaging the wider community, too – and perhaps even gaining a bishop's award for doing so! We've also now made a new long-term relationship through USPG with the Church in Bangladesh, particularly its medical outreach. Meanwhile, within the church building we look forward to the arrival of good wi-fi soon and have a clearer idea than we used to of how we can use it to keep connected. That's been a long wait, full of frustrations and let-downs, the brunt of which have been borne by David Watts, but a brighter digital future for St Mary's is on the horizon, when we can build on all we have learned and unlearned through digital experiments during lockdowns and their aftermath. We can truly say we aren't a church which has settled down into a rut of despondency of dead habit! So you can go on being hopeful on the basis of all that has been achieved thus far, as well as on the basis of new shoots which are showing-through.

Entering a Vacancy in July will involve some people in even more work, and Vacancies can be seen as dispiriting times by some congregations. There will have to be compromises made to keep worship going and available to all without overburdening a few. This will take 'good grace' from those who don't necessarily get out of church and worship exactly what they want. But Vacancies can also be times of growth and insight – as in the last one, when St Mary's clarified its vision of creating 'Community in the church and church in the community'. We have truly developed in the light of this vision over the last 6 years, I believe, and I have every confidence that the coming Vacancy, with the opportunity for reflection which it gives as a profile of the parish and Team is drawn up, will also be a time when good things are embedded, and green shoots of growth are nurtured.

Behind all this is the love of God and the power of his Spirit, which we celebrate particularly today, Pentecost Sunday. To us, it may all feel like hard work sometimes, but we know that the fruit of this hard work is actually given by grace; we don't create Kingdom moments. They come as gifts to re-create us, whether in worship, fellowship, or experiencing the joy of seeing members of our village community connect with us in new ways.

Life in the Spirit is all about connecting – connecting with God, connecting with each other and with the whole human community, and connecting more deeply with Creation in which the Spirit moves and breathes. It may sometimes feel that it would be more restful not to make the effort that connection involves; there might be less heated debate, for example, and less frustration over technology – but just think how much we lose if we retreat into ourselves and fail to connect!

So, this is, in summary, what I want to report of the last 7 months: St Mary's has kept on keeping on, learning and improving on ways of connecting, and laying down groundwork for the future. We have continued to prioritise this in our decisions and spending, and despite anxieties about our financial situation, we go forward in faith. Let's keep on keeping on in faith, hope and love, and show appreciation for each other as we do so.

Maggie Guite