

Christ Church, Bradford on Avon

Annual Report 2020-2021

The past year has been a very strange one for all of us, the Coronavirus pandemic turning our lives upside down: staying indoors, wearing a mask if we do go out, unable to meet family and friends, learning to shop on-line for delivery or 'click and collect' and meeting on-line via 'Zoom'. Some have lost loved ones or friends to Covid-19 and our hearts go out to them in their grief. For some, particularly those living alone or with health issues, this will have been a year of great distress and anxiety. Mums and dads have been 'home schooling' their children who are struggling with staying at home, not seeing their friends or playing sport. Those of us with dogs have never been more grateful for our four legged friends as they force us to get out of the house for a daily walk, meeting other dog-walkers as we go, if only to say '*Hello, how grateful we are to live where we do!*' For some it will perhaps even have been an opportunity to reconnect with a natural world they had lost touch with.

However, rejoice and be glad, there is light at the end of the tunnel! The third national lockdown (another word that has come into common usage) coupled with the extraordinary efforts to vaccinate the elderly and the more vulnerable, bring hope that the spring will see a gradual loosening of restrictions and a return to something closer to normality.

When allowed, we held five services in Christ Church during the latter part of 2020 including a joyful service on Christmas morning, all carefully planned so as to be socially distanced and with appropriate safety measures for both celebrant and congregation and at which we were pleased to welcome friends from other parishes and even some who are members of other church denominations. In November we held a socially distanced, outdoor Service of Remembrance which was beautiful in its simplicity and well attended.

Apart from Ann's regular letter, our fortnightly benefice news sheet NewsLink, has hitherto focussed on services and events across the benefice but has been extended to bring a smile and hope to our readers, by the inclusion of uplifting extracts, anecdotes, jokes and photographs of God's glorious creation and is being posted to those in our communities who do not have email or are unable to access it via the internet. In January we said goodbye to Tess in the benefice office and here record our thanks for her unfailing support.

Christ Church has also risen to the challenge of looking outward in support of our local community during these difficult times. Prayers have been placed on our notice boards and where allowed by government guidelines the church has largely remained open for private prayer each day from 10:00am to 4:00pm thanks to a team of willing volunteers who open and lock the church each day, turning on welcoming lights and music. This has been much appreciated by those who 'drop in', some almost daily as part of their allowed exercise. Our team of Friday gardeners, whilst following government guidance, have continued to tend the churchyard, presenting an opportunity to engage in a socially distanced way with those passing along the public footpath.

As the evenings drew in and the pandemic worsened a new team emerged to think 'outside the box' to try to bring some joy into peoples lives by celebrating Christmas early. Following on the success of the hearts and butterflies suspended in the trees reported on previously and notwithstanding Advent, the south porch was transformed into a Nativity scene with Mary, Joseph, the infant Jesus, a cow, donkey and geese in the stable (the characters having been made by Christ Church Primary School); 1200 coloured twinkling lights were suspended from the trees lining the paths through the churchyard, a Christmas Tree was placed outside the porch and decorated with a further 400 lights together with bells and stars made by the children (this was in addition to the usual tree inside the church) and a large illuminated cross was erected by the main gate facing all the traffic coming out of Bradford on Avon up

Mason's Lane. A knitted baby Jesus in a manger was delivered to all the members of The Ark mother and toddler group.

When Christmas Eve arrived we were not to be denied our celebration entirely. Instead of the regular scratch Nativity Service we held an impromptu Carol Sing in the churchyard around the Nativity scene in the porch (socially distanced of course). This was not advertised as we didn't want to create a spectator 'event' but nonetheless around 40 people including families turned up to sing carols and start their Christmas.

These initiatives have proved very popular with our community; those using the footpath as a thoroughway often stopping to see what's going on and express their appreciation. Parents brought their children to the Nativity display to explain the Christmas story and I know of at least one father who brought his toddler nearly everyday at her insistence and another child used her own pocket money to replace the star on top of our tree when it blew down!

As I write, the south porch continues to transform with the church seasons: we celebrated Candlemas with Christingle kits for children to take and make themselves and now in Lent we have a Prayer and Promise Tree which is slowly being filled with prayers and commitments to help improve God's creation.

In this season of Lent, yet another team have undertaken to create a series of Easter prayer stations around the church, a new station being added each week and Rector Ann and her team have provided Lent envelopes containing a palm cross, candle, prayer card, prayer pebble, bookmark and a prayer reminder. These have been distributed throughout the benefice and have been made available both inside Christ Church and in the south porch.

This is the season when we traditionally have held a Friday Lent Lunch in Christ Church, but as that is not possible a weekly benefice 'Zoom Lunch' has been organised.

Fabric

In the autumn of 2020 our architect, George Chedburn, made his Quinquennial Inspection and although we are still awaiting his final report the gutters have been cleared and plans are being made to rectify the badly cracked hopper on the north wall adjacent to the north transept. Unfortunately there has been some resulting water damage to the wall paintings and stonework of the arch leading from the nave to the organ space.

There is a separate report dealing with the ongoing proposals to create community oriented facilities and space within the church which is now known as the 'Future for Christ Church Project'.

Thank You!

Our thanks go to all those unnamed people, who over the past year have worked so hard to reach out to support and enrich our community when it has sometimes been hard to remain positive. Thank you for the enthusiasm, hard work and innovations that you have brought to our lives in these difficult times. Thanks to the grace of God, and with your commitment and hard work Christ Church continues to be 'a beacon at the top of the hill'.

Finally, a huge thank you to Rector Ann for all her hard work in guiding us through these difficult times, to Tessa for her unstinting support, to Bernard, Keith and Paul and also to Richard and Amy, who have risen to the challenge of producing the videos for our weekly services via YouTube. (Here we must also thank the members of the four parishes of our benefice who have videoed themselves reading or leading us in prayer). Thank you to all of you for supporting us and your role in providing us with a vital link to worship and connection to our church community!

March 2021