



Churches of North Bradford on Avon and Villages

Christ Church, Bradford on Avon, St Peter's Church, Monkton Farleigh
St James' Church, South Wraxall, St Nicholas Church, Winsley

Annual Report from the Rector 2020 - 2021

Introduction

None of us would have anticipated a pandemic, a complete lockdown of the country from March, followed by gradual reopening with restrictions and a further lockdown still current as I write in February 2021. This resulted in intermittent closure of our churches and disruption to our activities such as our carer and toddler groups, our coffee mornings, our planned weekend retreat to Lee Abbey; most of which have had to be put on hold due to government and Church of England restrictions.

However, on a positive note, we have learned new skills in order to move services, Open the Book and Collective Worship online. Many of us have retained that human contact by socially distanced walks, and learned to communicate much more by email, Zoom, Teams and WhatsApp, as well as spending more time actively listening to one another, even if just by phone.

We have utilised our churchyards as safe spaces outdoors, and our churches (when open) to provide activities for families, and opportunities of private prayer and reflection, and to promote our faith by expressing the different church seasons in different ways.

'Church' has happened albeit somewhat differently. From the very first week of lockdown which coincided with Mothering Sunday, posies were made and left with prayers in our churches for families to collect. Throughout the year we have demonstrated to our communities that our churches are open; our faith is alive, and I am extremely grateful for the creativity and commitment shown by so many with such a sense of joy.

Using Advent as an example, the use of church porches for Nativity displays, a Christmas Tree festival and displays of Nativity Sets from around the world as well as laminated prayers hung in trees from our school children, the Nativity Story told in pictures on railings; all these proved very popular with our communities who made a point of calling in regularly on their daily walks, and joined in by donating toys and money to chosen charities. Of course, thanks go to those who keep our churches open and safe week by week through opening, setting up and closing, drafting risk assessments, making sure churches are deep cleaned, that face masks and hand gel is always available and who sensitively book people in to attend Church Services.

Funerals have been allowed by the Government and have continued throughout. We have all experienced the deep sadness concerning restrictions on the numbers attending these services, especially when they have been much-loved members of our community. Supporting families through the process of making arrangements depending on the restrictions at the time, has taken much time and sensitivity.

Frustration was felt by our wedding couples many of whom tried in vain to hold the wedding of their dreams, only to find restrictions would not allow large gatherings. Weddings were initially banned until 4 July when one couple did get married on that day with seven guests present. Many have postponed their wedding to 2022 in the hope that the virus will have subsided. Only one family proceeded with a baptism; other families have postponed.

Funerals, weddings and baptisms are now much more complicated to arrange in church as there are so many details to consider in order to operate legally and keep everyone safe. Thank you to our PCC Standing Committees which have had to join me in making some difficult decisions, quickly, on behalf of their PCC.

A special thank you to Tessa for all her support and hard work this year. We have missed our regular planning meetings with Rachel, but Rachel has continued her pastoral care through her work. This year has been a year of having to respond straight away to the situation at hand rather than being able to plan, and we look forward to a time when restrictions ease.

Sunday Services

In September 2019 we adopted a new pattern of church services whilst retaining the variety of services including HC CW and BCP, Matins, Refresh, Prayer and Praise and Monday Meditation. It was hoped that this would meet the varying needs of our congregations and those who wish to join us. The Staff team took the decision that each Sunday must be sustainable with one or two priests, so we have adopted a different pattern of worship. We were due to review in August 2020. However, Sunday Services in church have been sporadic this year and we have been balancing the restrictions with keeping our congregation members safe.

When not in lockdown, until January, we have held some Sunday Services in church and we were very fortunate with the weather in holding a service of Holy Communion in the churchyard at Monkton Farleigh, outdoor Remembrance Services in each of our four communities, a Bereavement Service remembering those who had died, (although only the pastoral team could attend due to social distancing) and On Christmas Day all our churches held a service which were well attended. Hymns and Worship Songs are very much part of our worship and we look forward to the day when we can raise our voices in praise again.

As services moved online from March, we have been able to record different members of our congregations reading and leading prayers, with different members of the clergy preaching. I know those watching have really appreciated seeing others on screen, and I am grateful to all those who have spent time recording and discovering ways of sending large

files through. Thank you to Tessa's husband Richard and to my husband Malcolm for filming and to my daughter Amy for editing each Sunday recording.

Pastoral Support

We are pleased to have the support and prayers of our retired ministers and we are delighted to welcome back Keith, who returned to ministry in October following his sabbatical. He joins our group of retired ministers Paul, Bernard, Pat and Jim.

Ways of supporting members of our churches through Prayer and Communication chains were set up early on in the first Lockdown, and as NewsLink is mainly online, we have been more creative with space and content, without having to worry about the additional cost of colour printing. 39 people continue to receive NewsLink by post or hand delivery, so we hope everyone is kept in touch. Thank you to Hilary for coordinating the latter and to Denise who produced NewsLink weekly for us whilst Tessa was furloughed and now continues with this role.

Paul continues to provide oversight of the pastoral care and support given by our Lay Pastoral Assistants (LPAs), Denise (L), Denise (D), Gill, Daphne, Elizabeth, James and Stephen. Their pastoral support has been much needed this year. We welcome Margaret Blagbrough who has volunteered to coordinate services and support for our members at Avon Park, especially when restrictions ease.

Many thanks also to Jill who has continued to help me with the administration for, and contact with, wedding couples; her support has been invaluable. Sadly, Rachel, our LLM and our LWLs Denise (L) and Cedric and Penny have in the main not been able to lead worship this year, but once we return to regular Sunday worship, we hope to enjoy their many gifts within our team.

Musicians

We are forever grateful to our team of musicians whom we hope will return to playing regularly for Sunday services. Thanks go to Keith Bennett, Pippa Tate and her music group, Gerry Hoddinott, Jane Simmonds, Tricia Burns and her music group, Jackie Rice and Harold Jones who play for us. Sadly, no brass or wind instruments are allowed in church at present. This year we were sorry to say farewell to Fay Egerton who has withdrawn from playing.

Benefice Administrator - Tessa Stacey

After three years, Tessa has left to pursue her career as a Bereavement Coordinator for Dorothy House and as part of this role, she is training as a Counsellor. Tessa was a joy to work with and her creativity, her work on setting up the website and keeping us known on Social Media, especially Instagram, is very much appreciated. Denise Button is kindly volunteering to cover the role whilst we consider a revised job description to meet our changed administration and IT requirements.

Communication and Safeguarding

Both groups have continued to meet online.

The former considers how best we can best communicate with our communities, both internally and externally which has been even more important when we have not been able to meet regularly face to face. Ann Chapman designed a new Christmas Card for us depicting the Three Kings. These were distributed to everyone in our parishes, promoting activities in our churches and churchyards, rather than Church Services, which we could not predict at the time of printing. We also continue to seek to raise our church profile in local publications and village websites, especially 'A Church Near You'.

Safeguarding remained a priority and I continued to meet regularly with The Parish Safeguarding Officers to update our list of DBSs required, and training needed in our parishes, as well as to review Safeguarding procedures and policies. Most training has reverted to online for the time being.

Children's and Families Work

Tessa continues to take responsibility for overseeing Children's and Families work in the Benefice and for line-managing Zoe. Although Zoe only started in January 2020 and has been furloughed for some of the time, her ideas on how to include families in activities such as the Light Trails in our churchyards during half term in October, and activities during Advent and Christmas, have been inspirational and we look forward to her again supporting our families and the volunteers who are involved in children's and school work. One of the reasons for appointing a Children's and Families Worker is to build on our strengths and create new ways of being church for new generations.

Church Buildings

We continue to seek to improve our buildings for flexible use in the present and to preserve them for future generations. Various Faculties have been successful this year including the removal of a pew to create a prayer corner in St Peter's, the restoration of church bells in St James, and the application to install a kitchen and toilets in Christ Church is making good progress with the Diocese and external bodies such as Historic England and Bradford on Avon Preservation Society.

Church Schools

Our work with our three Church of England Primary Schools and our pre-schools has continued in different ways this year. Collective Worship has been online and Winsley Open the Book team produced videos on YouTube for our schools to use and they were very well received.

Thanks go to Tessa and Angela for their continuing and growing support for Winsley school which is part of the Palladian Academy based in Bath. Tessa is now Vice-Chair of Winsley School Governing Body and Sabine is Vice-Chair of Christ Church Governing Body, both

providing much support for their Governing Bodies Chairs, and are well-placed to bring their Christian influence on both schools. Angela continues to be a Foundation Governor of Winsley School, Jane, the Vicar of Shaw and Atworth is a Foundation Governor of Churchfields School and I continue as the Ex Officio Governor of Christ Church School. A key task for Governors in the latter is the appointment of a new Headteacher and a new Deputy Headteacher although this has proved very problematic when schools have been, in the main, closed except for the children of essential workers and for children who are at risk.

Thrive

Thrive is a Diocesan initiative run by CPAS, an organisation very much involved in training church leaders and PCCs. It brings together groups of volunteers from different Benefices to be learning communities, reflecting on the life of our churches and exploring ways that they can grow.

I volunteered our Benefice before the pandemic struck and the first weekend of training was delayed but took place in November online and we are now starting to meet on Zoom. There are 7 lay representatives from each of our four churches as well as Tessa and me as clergy, and we are supported by Rhona Floate, our Rural Field Officer for Wiltshire.

Our volunteers are Val Bryant, Alan Bryant, Jean Legg-Bagg, Hilary Pike, Gill Fairhurst, Rachel Exley and Valerie Calpin. We will report progress via our PCCs.

Church finance

Each of our four churches managed to pay their Parish Share in full in 2020 so thank you very much to everyone. Funding our churches and our initiatives however remains a challenge, and following Stewardship campaigns encouraging people to give via the Parish Giving Scheme, future plans are to launch a Legacy Campaign.

The present...

Despite the pandemic, due to the support from so many, our parish churches remain places at the heart of our communities. Although many of our physical activities are currently on hold, we need to remember that much continues online, such as house groups, PCC meetings, marriage preparation and of course our Sunday services which attract not just members of our church communities, but those who would not normally come to church, and those who are house bound. There is so much that is positive in and emanating from our churches that we will want to continue into the future.

The future...

As ever, there are some challenges and opportunities ahead of us this year including appointing some new Churchwardens and other office holders to enable our churches to flourish. We also need to encourage more people to be on welcome teams, to read in church and to lead us in prayer, and training will be provided. There is new legislation to enable churches to join together into a single PCC which may ease the burden on individual

churches and at a time of uncertainty in the Church of England, we should seriously explore this.

Thank you to all who support the churches in our Benefice in so many different ways, both practically and spiritually. We are a 'priesthood of all believers', and as such seek to involve people more fully in the various aspects of Christian mission and ministry.

Renewing Hope: Pray, Serve, Grow: My vision

There will always be more to work on in terms of encouraging families, growing more leaders, working on different modes of communication, stewardship campaigns and fund-raising. We will continue to explore the creative use of our buildings for mission, ways of growing disciples and how to enable those on the edge of church to know more about the Christian faith. Most importantly, we continue to discern where God wants us to put our time and energy.

Our churches today are vibrant communities. However, it was clear before the pandemic that we are not growing numerically, and just as Christ Church is engaged in doing, we seriously need to consider what 'church' in the future will look like, and how we can use our church buildings to support future ministry and our communities.

We will continue to build up strong links with our communities, with our primary schools and with families. We wish to create new worshipping opportunities, and new communities to enable us to offer Christian support and teaching in ways that work for today's families, and for different generations who might want to engage in ways that fit in with their very busy lives. At the moment we cannot predict the future. We do not know if the drift from living in cities to homes in towns and villages will continue. It is likely that our communities will however change as more people work from home for much of their working week, and are therefore available locally. This may open up all sorts of opportunities for us to engage differently with individuals.

Priorities for 2021 - 2022

1. To build back our church communities as we re-engage with regular worship and our social activities can restart.
2. To continue to use our churchyards and churches with resources for those who are on the margins, or new to Christianity.

Christ Church - to support the Faculty process and community engagement to install a kitchen and toilet facilities, new lighting and office and storage space.

St James - to support the Faculty to restore the church bells and explore ways of encouraging local school children via their teachers to engage with the project.

- St Nicholas -** to develop further links with Winsley Methodist Church to support the redevelopment of the church building
- St Peter's -** to support the PCC in submitting a faculty for church tower repairs
to develop its new prayer corner for use by the local pre-school and school.
- Benefice**
- a. To explore 'one parish' developments
 - b. To encourage creative work with children and families
 - c. To be fully engaged with *Thrive* as we seek to grow and develop our churches and leaders
 - d. To creatively use our church buildings and churchyards to engage our communities
 - e. To recruit a Benefice Administrator to meet the changing needs of the Benefice

The future may be uncertain, but I look forward to the future with confidence as we continue our journey of prayer and faith together.

Revd Ann Keating, Rector.

February 2021