

Vicar's Report for APCM May 2021

This report relates to the period January 2020 to December 2020, a period of time that has certainly challenged not just St Mary's Church but the whole Parish and beyond.

We started that Financial year with such positivity. The Parish Hall had just been refurbished thanks to a £2,500 grant from a local masonic group and £5,500 which came from our own funding. We had paid 70% of our Parish Share which we had gradually increased each year from 40% to 62% to 70% – in the current account we held just over £5,000 which we fully expected to gradually increase over the year back to its average amount of £10,500.

The Parish Hall had increased its bookings and over the previous year we had held several big missional church events for the local community.

As the year started we began hearing of the Covid 19 virus and it was first detected in the UK in late Jan 2020 and by mid February/early March it became a notifiable disease. On 23rd March the first National Lockdown began and church life as we knew it changed. St Mary's Church and the Parish Hall closed with no congregation and no vicar allowed in the building. With the closure of the Parish Hall we also lost our income from the Parish Hall which in the previous year went from running at a loss to making a profit of around £7,000.

There began a period of a huge learning curve, Easter was very early and I began to stream services using a mobile phone from the Vicarage. There were lots of challenges and for me and the PCC, as more and more people contracted COVID 19 and people lost loved ones, the question became where do we focus our energies when the church building is closed. How can we bring comfort and hope to those who need it and also to those who don't know they need it. How do we care not only for our congregation but our community?

It was decided that we would stream a service everyday apart from Saturday and so it began. In our notice sheet we included directions on how to join a live streamed service on our facebook page and we encouraged our older members to seek help with younger members of their families so that they would be able to join those services.

For me this is definitely missional moving forwards as although we have some members of our congregation who do not use technology, for the future most of our older members moving forwards will be competent in using IT and therefore as and when people's health doesn't allow them to come to church, they will still be able to attend on line and will remain connected over a greater period of time.

Alongside this pastorally Gail telephoned everyone every two weeks and I delivered a Notice Sheet to those that didn't have internet access whilst emailing a Notice Sheet to all those who wanted one and everyone was aware that if they had needs then we would be available to help etc. We also became part of a local community group, Tingley, Ardsley and Thorpe Viral Kindness offering a listening ear to those who were struggling.

Once Vicars were allowed back in Church – another new learning curve began – yes I could stream with my phone but how could I link all the music, organ and pictures together and make them work for people in church and for people at home. The diocese released some advice about streaming and so I ordered £366.00 worth of video and audio capture cards, leads and cables not having a clue how to use them but by trial and error and with much thanks to my eldest boy Thomas we managed to stream live to facebook via a computer using a program called Obs. The biggest challenge was having to drag 60ft cables from the Vicarage to the Church to be able to use wi-fi from the Vicarage. We continue to have our challenges but for the majority of services it has worked well.

All of this made a huge demand on my time and IT knowledge – everything took so long initially. Another thing that was a challenge for me at least was how to make Easter and Christmas meaningful under very difficult circumstances led to a major creative rethink of how to achieve those particular services.

Throughout 2020 we were unable to hold any social events including the Family Fun Day, Church Open day, and Christmas fair/Christmas Tree Festival. These events have always drawn in the Community and for someone whose whole ministry is based on hospitality, and engaging with people church became a very lonely place and it was never more apparent than when the last APCM was held in November.

There have been very few baptisms and no weddings at all this year due to the pandemic.

Now that was a very personal account but of course the PCC has met every month faithfully by Zoom – please see the PCC Secretary's report – as they have worked tirelessly in very difficult circumstances to ensure that all the Government's regulations, the Church of England regulations and the Leeds Diocese regulations were met. Social Distancing, masks and sanitising equipment had to be bought – an expense we couldn't really afford but approximately £1,000 was spent on kitting out the Church and the Parish Hall but as the pandemic continued throughout the whole of the year – this money not only proved a good investment in the equipment but it sat alongside the PCC's overriding concern for the wellbeing of all concerned.

Thank you to all of you for the time spent ensuring that St Mary's always has the community and mission at the forefront of all we do.

Thank you to our two church Wardens, Neal and Gary, who ably support my work and a big thank you to Neal who will be stepping down this year from being a Warden as he has now served six years in office.

In their roles of Pastoral Assistant and Reader, Gail and Dawn, have continued to come into their own this year, stepping up to learn new technology in order that they could lead worship services. Gail has particularly taken up responsibility for Pastoral Care and Dawn stepping up to lead crucial services and cover services/meetings that I could not. Both of them have multiple roles and devote a lot of time to serving St Mary's and supporting all of us so thank you to them.

A very difficult role this year has been the Treasurer's. Barbara has confidently and competently carried out this role, communicating and both myself and the PCC and advising accordingly as Finances have allowed – please see her report for further details. Thank you Barbara for all that you do. As you know I am not aware of nor should I be aware of how much people's giving is but I do get reports from Barbara of a general nature and I would like to say thank you to everyone who has kept up their giving during this time.

Another aspect of church life that has grown is cleaning, church and parish hall have had to be cleaned extra and at a deeper level on a more frequent basis. Gillian Thorpe is our cleaner and my thanks go to her but there have also been a rota of people to clean in between services or lets – thank you to them. Elaine and Duncan Jamieson have taken on the responsibility for cleaning the church and my thanks goes to them.

All soft furnishings, kneelers and children's corner have been removed from church in order to comply with current guidelines and all COVID guidelines has been followed and both buildings have up to date risk assessments.

With regards to the Parish Hall – all groups initially stopped their activities in the Parish Hall but when the finer details emerged and guidelines changed then St Mary's Playgroup continued to operate, however, the others will not be able to recommence for the foreseeable future.

With regard to our Parish Share we only managed to pay 38% this year – we continued to strive to pay as much as we could.

It hasn't been easy to combine those worshipping at home and those who worship on-line, however, there was a concerted effort to recognise that the church is the people and we are worshipping together as God's family, one congregation. I have met some wonderful new people on line who have for the first time dared to attend a church service and find out more about Jesus which is wonderful and those who attend regularly who were once new but are now regulars contribute to the church by donating both time and money.

It was the PCC's plan to get a quote for the East Window as it is in great and urgent need for repair. We were awarded a grant of £350.00 from Church Care to go towards a report which was ordered but will not be done until the weather improves next year, however, I set myself a challenge to kick off the East Window Fund and in September, I walked for 30 days, 21,000 steps per day, over 9.5 miles per day making a grand total of 285 miles. I cannot believe how generous people were in sponsoring or making a donation and we raised a massive £4,500.00. I was excited when it got to £800.00.

Lastly, this has been a difficult year for the gardening team to maintain the churchyard. For the longest time, there was no clear guidelines and so all activity was stopped and certainly it was not possible to have the Community Payback Team – we were fortunate that they came for a little time toward the end of the growing season and we just about regained control before unfortunately guideline meant they were unable to attend. Dave Townsend and Brian Mazurke have contributed so much to the Gardening Team and without them we simply wouldn't be able to keep up with the work. Thank you again for the generosity of

those who give to the Gardening Fund so that we can continue to pay for petrol, strimming wire etc and replace machinery when needed too.

Dave is also the Editor of the Magazine and I have to say thank you to him and those who contribute in any way. I have seen a lot of church magazines and I have to say the standard of the one produced here is very high. Dave has also printed off the magazines this year so that at various points in the year when the guidelines allowed they could be delivered. When the magazine has not been delivered then it has been placed on our website.

At Christmas time, Dave also built a stable containing the Nativity scene, outside of church as a way of being missional. We also placed two Christmas trees to the entrance of the church and invited the local community to hang a bauble in memory of their loved ones. Both of these ideas proved to be very successful and received a lot of positive comments

My final point would be that ultimately material things don't matter, it is who we love, how we treat others, and our relationship with God that is important. Many people lost loved ones in the most cruel of circumstances. They were not able to be present at their deaths or their funerals and it was heart breaking to see and to take funerals in such circumstances. We as a church have maintained a closeness, our faith has been challenged but we have continued to worship albeit in a new way and we have done our very best to reach out into our community. We have also done our best to protect those who are most at risk and vulnerable amongst us.

Thank you for all your support and as someone who very much believes in God's providence we will come through this pruned but stronger at some point in the near future.

Sharon