

## Rector's Reflection for Annual Church Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022

This weekend marks two full years of producing weekly Sunday worship online. As I sit and write on a sunny Saturday afternoon in March, exactly two years ago – on another beautiful March Saturday – we'd just recorded our first digital service in church: in one take, warts and all, using an iPad balanced on a table and two hymn books! The sound quality was terrible and the picture juddered every time we moved from lectern to screen and back again... but we all have to start somewhere. It's funny to recall that I had more thank you messages for that service than anything else I've done in nearly 9 years here 😊

Earlier that same week we had just managed to hold the 2020 Annual Church Meeting at All Saints – the very last thing we held in church before the first lockdown began and the world turned upside down. Fast forward two years and in some senses things have come full circle: we return for an in-person AGM on Monday and we're still recording our online services on the same iPad – only this time balanced on an ironing board in our lounge! It's amazing what you can do with a good mic and decent editing software.

Similarly, much of what we used to do BC – Before Covid – has returned. Alongside weekly in-person worship, communion is back, refreshments are back, monthly coffee mornings are back, Dorcas is back, midweek groups never went away but are back in person for Lent, weddings and baptisms are back, litter picks are (occasionally) back, care home services have just re-started, schools work likewise never went away but the local schools' Autumn exhibition in church is back.

To this we can add some wonderful new initiatives which covid unexpectedly gave us by forcing us online: a brilliant Virtual Choir, amazing online Creative Exhibitions, monthly Zoom Quiz Night and Daily Inspirations posted to the website. Over the last couple of years we've also enjoyed Crafty Church for Kids, Zoom Kids, Zoom Sunday Coffee, a virtual Week of Guided Prayer as well as a virtual 12 hours of prayer for Thy Kingdom Come. Crises act as a petri dish for creativity.

But we must also acknowledge that, in this season of profound change, it's not a case of 'back to normal'. As people we are different: no-one lives through the last two years without changing, perhaps even in ways we hadn't noticed. And because we are all, at some level, different, it is inevitable that our community life is different: the shape of who we are and what we do is evolving. Some of what we used to do was forced to stop and we're not sure yet if and how it will return: Cafe Church, Go4th, Children's Church, Rest, early morning worship – these are (and were) immensely valuable but may take a different shape in the time to come, or maybe something new will bubble up in its stead. In addition, although we kept both going for the first 18 months of the pandemic, we said goodbye in the early Autumn of 2021 to our older youth group and also to Rock Solid – something that was a personal joy to me fortnightly on Thursday evenings for 7 years.

So we have faced great changes, and yet there is so much to celebrate. The broad shape of our community life has shifted significantly over the last couple of years in three very encouraging ways: first, we have been delighted to welcome many newcomers in-person on Sunday mornings: more than in any previous season of my time here. To those of you reading my annual reflection for the first time: it's great to have you with us! You are most welcome 😊

Second, we have closer links with our sister church of St Mary's than ever before. As most of you know, I really have two part-time jobs: as Rector of All Saints and as Rector of St. Mary's – two churches of roughly equal size 2 ½ miles apart. Whilst we have long been part of the same team, on a day-to-day basis each functions independently: its own neighbourhood to serve, its own culture, its own governance. However, the pandemic has allowed us to share at a deeper level: not just one online service for both congregations, but shared ministry – for example, the choir or the exhibitions team. You've all got used to hearing

unfamiliar voices on the online services, who now probably seem as much a part of our church family as the people we're used to seeing in-person.

Thirdly, our online congregation is here to stay. It just offers too much fruit and blessing to call it a day. Hundreds of people still watch every week – longstanding church members, friends and family spread around the country and even the world, pastoral contacts e.g. via funerals and others who live locally but who worship with us online as a way of seeing who we are. It is a lifeline for those who are housebound or clinically vulnerable, as well as offering families who are geographically spread ways to connect in worship that were never previously possible.

We've discovered that keeping a 'local' feel is a vital factor in its success: anyone who wants a 'big show' will click on any of the famous churches, and that's fine: but many more people want something that feels like the sort of church they would naturally go to, something 'for them'. That's why we're still recording on an iPad on the ironing board, and also why we pre-record. Talking direct to camera means that when you worship online the presenter is speaking to you, you're not just looking in on something that is designed for other people. It is a helpful side-benefit that pre-recording means you can watch it anytime – I'm sure *none* of you ever over-sleep on a Sunday – and also that I only have to record once!

So what does the coming year hold? Well, as I've said above, we are now a hybrid community, being church in-person and online. I want to stress, though, that we remain *one* family. Not just because I record the same Sunday sermon online as face-to-face – but because we are *All Saints*. There is no hierarchy of membership: all of you are equally precious!

Second, we want to help all our new joiners to feel at home, make friends and find ways to get stuck in. Plus we want this to be our ongoing DNA – open to all and just as ready to welcome newcomers in the future.

Third, we will tread carefully in terms of reviewing what to re-start and when. We need to be careful not just to do things 'because we used to', or 'because we *should* be...' I would love to see new initiatives flourishing, but only if they're sustainable. The fruitfulness of the last couple of years, despite the limitations imposed on us, shows that sometimes less really is more. And if it ain't broke...

Finally I don't want to finish without extending huge thanks to the many people who continue to give unstintingly to our family. Some of you would appear several times in the lists below, so apologies in advance that I've only mentioned each of you once 😊 So: to Pat especially as our outstanding churchwarden – and I'm delighted that Barny will be joining her this year! – to Ian our brilliant treasurer; to Rosie and Philip our creative geniuses (genii?); to Sylvia, Carolyn, Jane L, B, Gloria, Pauline, Ron, Virginia, Sandra, Gill, Margaret, Jane C and all who've faithfully made Sundays and other services happen; to Ayokunnu, Dawn, Mark, Niki, Amanda, Paul N and Moira as stewards current, new and retiring; to Wayne, Paul T, Brian and Nick for their practical skills; to all of our mowing team; to Trish and the bellringers; to Sandy our social media guru, and of course, to the wonderful Alise, who does so much more than any of you know.... and to anyone I should have mentioned: please forgive my brain blip!

If we've learnt anything from the last two years it's to accept the unknown. I'm so proud of all of you in the way that we've navigated a unique season, in such good heart and with so much life. May God continue to lead us in this coming year, and grant us grace to be good listeners – just to hear His voice is everything!

## Churchwarden's Report 2021 – 2022

Reporting on a year gradually recovering from the covid pandemic we have felt optimistic and give thanks – we are singing again, we have welcomed many new friends to our church services, we hear our church bells again. We are finding ways forward to build our patterns of worship, celebrate occasions and listen and learn from the word of God. Our church is present both in person and on line. Now, as the agonising humanitarian crisis in Ukraine dominates our lives, practical support and prayer continues to be our focus.

Whilst Church was closed for in person worship from 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 to 20 March 2021 and again over Easter 2021, on line services, led by Matt maintained and spread God's word and the way church lives. Safety and concern for social distancing were prioritized throughout, masks worn and risk assessments regularly reviewed as regulation levels for Covid fluctuated or were reduced.

The lockdowns of 2021 also served to increase the creative ways to bring our community together. We are enjoying new online initiatives; Choir and Creative art & craft exhibitions. Christmas card creations gave more opportunity for talent in person and the on line quiz nights have continued to encourage social interaction. Study groups and prayer time have continued. The weekly on line services regularly share the readers and prayers between All Saints and St Mary's, and gradually the in person pattern of worship is encompassing more participants sharing the organisation and responsibilities for weekly worship.

'Singing' again, albeit with a mask, has been quite a milestone and with the safe introduction of sharing communion, as a part of our worship, is greatly valued. We have a renewed breadth to our music particularly encouraged by the range possible with online worship. Refreshments have become a part of our weekly after service time with the congregation, leading also to monthly coffee mornings restarting in March 2022. The bell ringing team once again meet for practice and with encouragement for new ringers to join the team continue to sustain this much loved tradition. Our regular woodwind band 'Concrete Calves' is once again able to rehearse weekly in their preferred location and we look forward to their next concert. A special focus for our Harvest celebrations in September brought many parents and children in to church to enjoy the exhibition of school work from three local Primary Schools for 'Great Big Green Week'. We were also delighted to welcome 'World Vision' in December to film for their Christmas carol service.

Huge thanks to Sylvia, Rosie, Jane, Gloria, Dawn and Carolyn for their reliable and invaluable assistance with the weekly life in church.

**Whilst our Dorcas group**, coordinated by Sylvia, was only able to meet in person twice in 2021 members continued to knit through the year to produce blankets and provide toiletry goods for the work of MK Act. It is now resuming meetings and approaching new causes. Sylvia has also expertly refurbished another Altar Frontal during the year.

The **Life Events Services** / Occasional Offices of Weddings, Baptisms and Funerals/Interments contribute significantly to Church life in the community. Weddings were celebrated in March, July, September and November. Baptisms were held throughout the summer and remainder of the year, often outdoors when weather allowed, providing special meaning and time for family and friends to celebrate together. A number of Interments have been held and one burial.



In September 2021 Bishop Steven, Bishop of Oxford set out on a five day Pilgrimage in North Bucks across the three deaneries of Buckingham, Newport Pagnell and Milton Keynes. We were pleased to welcome Bishop Steven to All Saints as part of this Pilgrimage Prayer Walk and following a prayer time receive the chalking of the phrase C+M+B-2021 on the pillar to the church porch Christus Mansionem Benedicat translating as “May Christ bless this house”.



**Some quinquennial repair works** namely; pointing on the belltower west facing aspect, finishing to the pinnacle south facing and painting of downpipe and gutter north facing were completed in Spring 2021, invoice and Architect fees settled and grants claimed. The next Quinquennial Inspection is not far away!



**Routine maintenance** inside and outside the church has continued with the dedicated team of stewards and mowers to ensure the building and churchyard are in good order. Thanks to Wayne, Paul and Barny for their work with the maintenance of the church building, Brian and team for churchyard mowing with assistance from David Monk for weekly refuse arrangements of bin collections. A Churchyard working group in May 2021 clearing weeds and overgrown graves was a valuable opportunity to assess the condition of the churchyard and plan future works. Some annual tree maintenance has been completed with additional works underway for removal of dead and superfluous tree growth. As the Garden of Rest in the south west of the churchyard fills, work is progressing on the application for a further Garden of Rest in the most suitable area.

**Annual health and safety requirements** have been addressed through the year:

Lightning conductor inspection and test completed October 2021, NB annual test date varies to enable testing in varying climatic conditions as seasons affect readings. Annual fire equipment check and portable appliance testing completed January 2022. The 5 year fixed wire electrical inspection certificate January 2020 is valid until 2025.

For reassurance and legislative compliance there is confirmation of the maintenance of the formal areas required recorded in the documents below:

- the terrier – a list of land belonging to the church
- the inventory – a list of all the items belonging to the church
- the log book – a detailed record of all the alterations, additions and repairs carried out in relation to the church, its land and its contents.

These have all been maintained to ensure the day to day functioning of the Church and are available as hard copies in the church. The Church Deanery / Archdeacon’s Parish Inspection of these documents, registers, policies, certificates, churchyard records, and church contents plus review of issues in the parish including the current Parish Mission Action Plan and various other papers relating to church life took place successfully on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021.

As the months progress we are greatly encouraged to build on the new life in and around church, to extend our pastoral work and give thanks for the leadership from Matt and our clergy team in this ever growing parish.

**Patricia A Sawyer      Churchwarden      March 2022**