

Vicar's Report, APCM 9th May, 2021

It is just over 6 months ago that we had our last APCM, which had been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Sadly, the pandemic has continued to be a scourge locally and internationally with the UK Kent variant resulting in another terrible wave of infection. While churches were permitted in law to open, the diocese recommended churches made decisions based on local conditions. Dartford being one of the more badly hit areas and seeing the pressure on our local hospital, the PCC felt the responsible course of action was to shut until the situation improved. Following the passing of a PCC resolution and bringing that to the Bishop, he then gave approval. The church therefore shut for January, then February and then most of March. Hence, overall, the church building was closed for Sunday worship from 3rd January to 21st March, re-opening for Palm Sunday 28th March.

Online worship continued throughout that time, available from 10am each Sunday on Youtube. In addition, our 11am Sunday phone-in service has continued to meet a need for those without the technology for online access. The church has also remained open for private prayer 2-3pm on a Wednesday afternoon.

We have continued to keep in touch with one another by phone, email, post, Whatsapp, Zoom, etc., with house groups still meeting online and people making the occasional doorstep visit or going on walks together when that has been permitted.

As things have gradually opened-up again, we are now having a weekly 9am service and a monthly 11am all age service. Our junior church has been able to meet face to face in the church garden again, having had a rich programme of activity online for many months. The face to face gatherings will be monthly to start with and grow from there.

Socially, we are looking to have small gatherings in the church garden, following current guidelines, and gradually expand and develop events like that, in order to re-build the community life of the church.

I am so grateful to all those who have made efforts to keep in touch with one another over this time and to those who have worked to make the reopening of the church possible.

At the PCC meeting on 20th January the PCC approved a new mission statement, 'To be and to make followers of Christ'. To reinforce this I produced the seven-session 'Following Christ' course. This was used by the three housegroups, as well as an additional group especially created for the lent period. The course doubles up as a confirmation class as well as an introduction to the Christian faith for enquirers. The response has been very positive with five people going on to be confirmed and lots of people viewing on YouTube. The course aims to present a well-rounded view of Christian discipleship, including evangelism, discipleship, social action, social justice, caring for creation, following in the spirit's power and personal commitment. These themes will shape our priorities moving forward.

At the PCC meeting on 24th March, the PCC formally passed a resolution recognising that the world is facing a climate and environmental emergency and committing to

make an action plan over the next 6 months for what we can do within the life of our church to help. At our Christian Aid service next week (16th May) this decision will be advertised and the Christian Aid speaker will be highlighting similar concerns. The hope is that this will become part of how we approach church life moving forward.

Our much-loved wardens Deb and Olu are standing down now after three years in those roles. They have been faithful servants during one of the most challenging times in the history of Christ Church and we acknowledge with thanks their huge contribution to our life together.

I also thank the rest of the lockdown leadership team, Michael, Gill, Sharon, Lynne and Laura, who have steered us through these difficult waters. Catherine too has helped carry the church by compiling the weekly online service as well as providing the music.

Many others have supported in other ways and while I can't mention everyone, I'm deeply aware of the contribution people make to our life together.

We give thanks to God, therefore. Although this has been a year marked by tragedy, with God's strength people have shown remarkable resilience. We pray for those who remain physically, spiritually or mentally very broken and pray for our hurting world. But we do see signs of hope, and as we look to the future, Christ will be our sure foundation and our guide. To him be glory for ever and ever, Amen!

God bless,
Richard